

Long-Form Grading Criteria for Rutgers WP Analytic Essays

I. Explication of Categories

THESIS

The thesis is a paper's arguable position, which should be original (that is, not completely obvious or exclusively reliant on concepts addressed in class discussion) and derived from synthetic analysis of evidence. A strong thesis *requires* compelling evidence to support and develop it: without evidence, a claim is merely an unsubstantiated idea or opinion. When we talk about the "thesis" in Writing Program courses, we mean the interpretive position that runs throughout and motivates a paper, although sometimes instructors also use the word "thesis" to mean "thesis *statement*." The thesis statement is a moment in the paper's opening when the writer explicitly articulates the paper's overarching claim. The thesis statement is typically one to three sentences and describes not only *what* the paper's arguable position is, but also *how* the paper will develop that position and *why* this position is important or insightful. Note that it is possible for a paper to have a thesis – that is, an overarching interpretive position – without ever explicitly articulating that thesis as a thesis *statement*.

WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS

Work with assigned texts denotes the ways in which the writer puts sources in conversation with one another to substantiate and develop the thesis. By analyzing and creatively interpreting sources as part of an intellectual conversation, a paper's work with assigned texts provides evidence for the arguable position of the thesis. The most important aspects of this critical engagement are (1) to close-read idea-rich textual passages (although a paper may employ limited amounts of paraphrase and summary to contextualize its analysis) in order to discover and represent implicit significance, and (2) to create connections between different sources in order to contribute a new interpretive position to an ongoing intellectual conversation.

STRUCTURAL COHERENCE

Structure refers to the arrangement of a paper's parts to convey the progressive development of the thesis. When a paper possesses strong "structural coherence," it has a clear and logical line of reasoning from beginning to end, as well as within and between paragraphs. At the level of the whole paper, structural coherence means that each individual paragraph depends and builds upon those that precede it, allowing for a dynamic development of the thesis. One indication of an essay's structural coherence is the use of topic sentences – one or more sentences at the beginning of a paragraph that articulates that paragraph's central claim or idea – and other elements of rhetorical "signposting." At the level of the individual paragraph, structural coherence means that every sentence connects to those around it, following on from the previous and preparing the way for the next. Development of a coherent structure thus requires transitions. If the writer asserts "claim A" it is necessary to show clearly how and why the paper then moves to "claim B" (and to "C," "D," etc.)

PRESENTATION

A paper's presentation entails the accepted standards of various elements of academic writing, including grammar, mechanics, citational conventions, and rhetorical style (i.e. voice, diction, tone, etc.). Evidence of careful proofreading is an important aspect of a paper's presentation. While WP courses will often incorporate lessons on grammar and writing mechanics, the curriculum prioritizes the development of synthetic thinking, interpretive connection-making, and cogent analysis – *not* the achievement of sentence-level correctness.

II. Delineation of Grade Levels

Papers should fit all four categories to some degree to receive the grade defined; however, **THESIS** and **WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS** are the most important categories and should therefore figure more significantly than **STRUCTURAL COHERENCE** and **PRESENTATION** when determining a paper's final grade. Note that it is not required that papers fulfill every criteria of a grade level to receive that grade.

A

An 'A' paper might have several 'B' or even 'C' moments, but these moments do not significantly detract from the essay's overall success. This means that while the standards for the 'A' paper are indeed high, the grade should be attainable since it does *not* mandate perfection.

THESIS

- In an 'A' paper, the thesis is original, specific, and exhibits complex thought and discovery. A distinguishing quality of the 'A' paper's thesis is that the writer understands and is in command of the thesis from the beginning of the paper and clearly conveys that understanding to the reader in an explicit and focused thesis statement.
- The thesis of an 'A' paper demonstrates sensitivity to the complexity of its own arguable position, often acknowledging and addressing the limitations, implications, and ambiguities of that position. The writer is aware of the thesis's broader stakes and may seek to incorporate those stakes into the thesis statement itself.
- The thesis is likely to exhibit real creativity in response to the question or problem it addresses and may even advance an interpretive position that is surprising and genuinely interesting.

WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS

- When close-reading and creating connections between texts, the 'A' paper is likely to take interpretive risks that lead to insightful, persuasive claims. (This is distinct from papers in the 'B' range, which may take interpretive risks that are only partially successful.)
- The 'A' paper close-reads idea-rich passages confidently and capably, employing surprising interpretive contexts to make textual connections.
- The 'A' paper presents sustained development and effective articulation of a thesis that is derived from analysis of ideas from the texts, yet that thesis is *not* reducible to conceptual relationships readily identifiable in the texts' content.
- The 'A' paper indicates how its thesis contributes to an ongoing intellectual conversation – a conversation to which the texts cited by the paper for evidence are also contributors.

STRUCTURAL COHERENCE

- The writer confidently transitions between the essay's multiple parts, clearly explicating the logic of the essay's line of reasoning and effectively using topic sentences and other structural "signposts" to indicate how each constituent part builds upon those that precede it.
- An 'A' paper's structure has a sense of momentum that contributes to its overall effectiveness, demonstrating that the writer is in control of the progressive development of the thesis from one paragraph to the next.
- An 'A' paper demonstrates understanding of the paragraph's function as a unit of meaning, employing paragraphs of reasonable length that incorporate appropriate levels of analysis and citation.
- An 'A' paper's conclusion may indicate an awareness of the questions generated by its own claims that exceed the scope of that individual essay. The conclusion may therefore gesture toward new interpretive horizons for the intellectual conversation in which the essay intervenes.

PRESENTATION

- In most cases, the presentation of an 'A' paper will be clear and relatively error-free. The prose is cogent, readable, exhibits evidence of careful proofreading, and may convey the sense that the writer has composed and revised the essay with an eye toward the reader's experience.
- While an eloquent rhetorical voice might contribute to a paper receiving an 'A' grade, it is *not* a requisite qualification.

B range

A 'B' paper might have several 'C' moments, but these moments do not significantly detract from the essay's overall success.

THESIS

- In a 'B' paper, the thesis represents an original interpretive position, and the writer represents that thesis with reasonable accuracy as a thesis statement in the essay's opening.
- The thesis of a 'B' paper advances independent ideas that derive from synthetic analysis of the assigned texts; however, the thesis is unlikely to appreciate and acknowledge the full complexity and nuance of its ideas and claims. The 'B' thesis may only begin to be aware of its implications and broader stakes.
- The thesis of a 'B' paper is likely to develop in a repetitive or predictable manner.

WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS

- The 'B' paper successfully engages a range of textual evidence and demonstrates the writer's willingness to begin to take interpretive risks when responding to the assignment.
- The 'B' paper demonstrates that the writer can work with textual evidence in a number of ways. It does not rely solely on summary, reference, or paraphrasing, but close-reads textual evidence and makes interpretive connections.
- A paper that successfully works with texts to support its thesis but does *not* work with texts to complicate, refine, or qualify its thesis is likely to be in the 'B' range.

STRUCTURAL COHERENCE

- The 'B' paper's use of the paragraph as a unit of meaning is generally successful throughout.
- The 'B' paper demonstrates reasonable coherence in its overarching structure: there are clear relationships between paragraphs, and the writer employs topic sentences with relative consistency.
- In the 'B' paper, the development of the thesis is logical and organized, and may feel deliberate; that is, an educated, thoughtful reader will likely feel the writer to be in increasing control of the development of ideas throughout the paper.

PRESENTATION

- The presentation of a 'B' paper can vary considerably: sometimes a 'B' paper may possess a cogent prose voice and grammatically correct sentences, and sometimes it may have numerous errors (although none that significantly impede meaning). This means that it is difficult to generalize about what the presentation of the 'B' paper may look like.
- While the 'B' paper may exhibit patterns of error in its presentation, an important distinction between 'B' and 'C' range papers is that in 'B' range papers, there is evidence that the writer is aware of these patterns of error and is actively working to address them.

- Evidence of careful proofreading is often more apparent in the 'B' range paper than in the 'C' range paper.

B+ distinguishing qualities

The 'B+' paper shares many qualities with the 'B' paper, but is likely to distinguish itself in the following ways:

- The 'B+' paper begins to understand the implications of its thesis but is unlikely to acknowledge or articulate the full complexity of the paper's overarching position. The 'B+' paper often exhibits a turn in interpretive thinking that is not fully integrated into the development of the thesis.
- The 'B+' paper demonstrates that the writer can assume confidence and authority working with a wide range of textual evidence.
- The 'B+' paper is likely to include more sophisticated work with textual evidence, including an ability to close-read with particular insight, although emerging moments of interpretive insight are less fully realized than in the 'A' paper.
- The 'B+' paper is well organized: each paragraph clearly functions within the paper and contributes to the thesis with an overall fluid movement.

C range

THESIS

- In the 'C' paper, there is evidence of an emerging thesis, although the writer rarely articulates that emerging thesis as a thesis statement in the paper's opening. Much more common is for the writer to arrive at an inchoate thesis near the paper's end, after discussing textual evidence.
- The 'C' paper takes a clear interpretive position at least once. This is an important distinction between the 'C' and the 'NP' paper.
- The thesis of a 'C' paper is likely vague, general, or imprecise. An educated, thoughtful reader might have the sense that the writer is not in command of the paper's overarching position.

WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS

- The 'C' paper demonstrates that the writer has tried to engage meaningfully with the ideas in the readings, although the connections the paper makes within and between texts are often implicit and underdeveloped.
- The 'C' paper contains at least one instance of attempted close-reading. This is an important distinction between the 'C' and the 'NP' paper.
- The 'C' paper is likely to make textual connections in a mechanical and formulaic manner. Relatedly, it is likely that the 'C' paper lacks a clear sense that the writer's voice contributes to an ongoing intellectual conversation.
- Although a 'C' paper may include several instances of summary, the quality of the summary demonstrates accurate reading comprehension and may help the writer begin to discover a focus for the emerging thesis.

STRUCTURAL COHERENCE

- The 'C' paper demonstrates that the writer has a basic understanding of the purpose and conventions of a paragraph. Most paragraphs are focused on one claim and are of reasonable length.

- It is likely that the 'C' paper lacks an overarching organizational structure; however, the writer may create coherent relationships between ideas *within* paragraphs.
- It is possible that the reader may discern an underlying structure in the paper, even if the writer does not appear to be in control of that structure.
- The 'C' paper is likely to employ topic sentences and other transitions inconsistently.

PRESENTATION

- A 'C' paper may exhibit a combination of successful and unsuccessful presentational qualities. While it may contain patterns of error, those errors are neither so numerous nor so grave as to impede meaning throughout the majority of the paper. This is an important distinction between the 'C' and the 'NP' paper.
- Because presentation is the least significant of the four evaluative categories, it is possible that a clearly written paper with minimal or no errors might still receive a 'C' because of the quality of its thesis and work with assigned text.
- Evidence of proofreading may be minimal or lacking.

C+ distinguishing qualities

The 'C+' paper shares some qualities with the 'C' paper, but is likely to distinguish itself in the following ways:

- The 'C+' paper has a thesis, but that thesis may not be clearly articulated in the essay's opening. In many cases, the 'C+' paper presents a thesis statement in its opening that fails to express the true achievement of the paper.
- The 'C+' paper includes several moments of close-reading and begins to engage more complicated ideas in the texts; however, the analysis and connective thinking in a 'C+' paper may be inconsistent. A 'C+' paper often distinguishes itself by including among those several moments one especially interesting or insightful instance of close-reading or connective thinking.
- The 'C+' paper's structural coherence may hew more closely to qualities outlined for the 'B' paper than for the 'C' paper, although the 'C+' paper's use of topic sentences and transitions may be weaker than the prototypical 'B.'
- The presentation of a 'C+' paper can vary considerably: sometimes a 'C+' paper may possess a cogent prose voice and grammatically correct sentences, and sometimes it may have numerous errors (although none that significantly impede meaning). This means that it is difficult to generalize about what the presentation of the 'C+' paper may look like.

NP

THESIS

- The 'NP' 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 an overarching interpretive position.
- The 'NP' paper might articulate what the writer believes to be a thesis statement, but which is actually personal opinion or descriptive fact, containing no interpretive or synthetic insight.
- Alternatively, the paper may have an emerging thesis but rely too heavily on summary, paraphrase, or sweeping generalizations, thus failing to derive its thesis from textual analysis.
- The paper may show minimal or no attempt to revise from the rough draft to the final draft.

WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS

- The paper is likely to exhibit no evidence of meaningful attempts to close-read.
- The paper does not engage interpretively with the assigned readings, although it may gesture to issues raised by the assignment question. It is likely to make sweeping generalizations and to summarize or paraphrase the texts.
- The paper may demonstrate a lack of basic reading comprehension or misinterpret fundamental concepts in the texts.
- The paper may attempt to cite personal opinions, anecdotes, or extraneous material as substantiating evidence, rather than engaging in textual analysis.

STRUCTURAL COHERENCE

- The paper may demonstrate little or no understanding of the purpose and conventions of a paragraph. Paragraphs may be far too short (comprising fewer than four sentences), far too long (comprising multiple pages), and/or lack internal logic.
- The paper is likely to lack coherence in its organizational structure. An educated, thoughtful reader may struggle to determine why the paper's paragraphs are presented in the order in which they appear.
- It is unlikely that the paper employs topic sentences, deliberate transitions, or any sense or progressive development throughout.
- In some cases, a paper may exhibit unsuccessful structural coherence because it employs the "five-paragraph essay" model, wherein there is minimal or no connective thinking in evidence.

PRESENTATION

- A paper should *not* receive 'NP' as a final grade exclusively because of presentational issues. Conversely, a paper should *not* pass exclusively because its writer employs a cogent prose voice (when the paper lacks an original thesis, fails to critically engage textual evidence, etc.)
- When a paper exhibits unsuccessful presentation, it is likely that syntactical and/or semantic patterns of error impede the writer's intended meaning, making it exceedingly difficult (or impossible) for an educated, thoughtful reader to comprehend the essay's sentences. Comprehensibility is one of the most important benchmarks when evaluating the success of a paper's presentation.
- A paper with unsuccessful presentation may exhibit little or no evidence of proofreading.
- The paper may fail to cite its sources or inadequately adhere to citational conventions, thereby indicating issues with academic integrity.