

TA Seminar: Tips and Tools for Grading in Liberal Arts Disciplines - Tuesday October 25, 2011, 12:00pm/ TEL Building room 1014

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A Paper

A paper of this level displays a mastery of the information and the theoretical context in which it is presented. It contains original thought expressed fluently and written with a style distinguished by its freshness and clarity. The argument is sound, substantive, organized, introduces other points of view and uses proper sources effectively. One is impressed by the author's contribution to the understanding of the topic and where the subject is going.

B Paper

The author demonstrates a substantial knowledge of the information and theoretical concepts associated with the subject. The paper is well-written and presented with no serious flaws, a good use of sources and a clear thesis. The argument is above average in organization and analysis and brings in points to support the thesis. There is an awareness of different points of view. The conclusion is sound but not original. Generally, the paper is competent but not extraordinary.

C Paper

The author demonstrates an acceptable grasp of the material and awareness of the sources and general theory. The organization is logical and the style follows proper form, although there may be some lapses in each aspect. The paper would be best described as descriptive because it lacks any substantial analysis, and demonstrates a modest ability to work with the material critically. One senses the author does not fully understand the issues of the subject because the ideas are shallow, undeveloped, and tend to stray from the subject.

D Paper

The author shows a familiarity with the subject, but not an understanding of it. He or she lacks the writing or communication skill to intelligibly relate what knowledge has been comprehended. The paper is disorganized, lacks structure, and the ideas are undeveloped. There is no evidence of substantial thought.

F Paper

The author is without any writing skill. Grammar and spelling errors dominate and disguise the lack of organization. The ideas are unrelated to the subject and reveal a complete misunderstanding of the task.

<http://web.uvic.ca/~gradean/ta7.html>

Date:

Student:

Evaluation Criteria

I consider the following criteria when assessing your essay, in roughly this order of importance. Be aware that if there are extreme problems in your grammar and style, it often impacts on the development of your argument. Also keep in mind that improper citation reflects directly on the Analytical content and the originality of your paper. However, to improve your essay, concentrate especially on parts 1-4.

1. ANALYTICAL CONTENT

- Discussion emphasizes analysis and/or argument, avoiding excessive description or summary
- Paper includes good understanding and interpretation of course content
- Arguments are supported with evidence (quotations or references) from relevant sources
- Evidence from source is cited (parenthetically or with footnotes) as required

2. DEVELOPMENT OF ARGUMENT

- Argument unfolds in logical, coherent fashion; ‘train of thought’ is easy to follow
- Discussion remains focused, and avoids irrelevant tangents and repetition
- Quotations are introduced, contextualised, and explained adequately, without “making the argument for you.”
- Discussion covers all of the relevant points needed to support thesis

3. THESIS STATEMENT, INTRODUCTION, AND CONCLUSION

- Introduces general subject of essay, then quickly narrows focus down to thesis
- Thesis statement is clear, explicit, and focused (not absent, weak, or ineffective). It does not “repeat” the question, and contains both a *what* and *why* component
- Conclusion reflects on, but does not simply repeat the introduction, and *concludes*. (reviews the argument after the evidence has been introduced)

4. ORIGINALITY AND INVENTIVENESS

- Explores evidence not discussed in tutorial and lecture
- Paraphrases secondary sources where appropriate
- Fresh ideas and synthesis. (“A” papers take chances)
- Deals with *significance* of argument (Answers the ‘so what?’ question.)

5. PARAGRAPHING

- Clear topic sentences that link your paragraphs to your thesis or stages of argument
- Sense of development
- Overall flow and readability
- Avoids one sentence or one page paragraphs

6. GRAMMAR AND STYLE

- All sentences are complete (and are neither sentence fragments nor run-ons)
- Discussion uses formal language, and avoids jargon, clichés, and slang
- Discussion is concise, and ideas are expressed succinctly
- Writing contains no vague pronoun references and follows accepted grammatical conventions

7. MECHANICS

- Discussion avoids contractions and other abbreviations
- Essay has been properly proofread and avoids typos, spelling errors and punctuation problems.
- Essay follows grader's requirements for title pages, page #'s, footnotes, bibliographies, fonts and margins
- Essay meets the requirements outlined on the assignment sheet(s)

Essay Marking Sheet- Points

Student:

Grade:

CONTENT **/30**

- demonstration that research materials were understood
- essay includes citations, but is not predominantly made of citations
- citations used are appropriate and help to further the thesis statement argument
- critical assessment of research; nothing is accepted at face value
- student's own ideas are present and developed
- demonstration that information presented has been carefully and specifically chosen to strengthen the thesis statement
- use of appropriate course terminology and concepts – essay clearly fits within the scope of the course

STRUCTURE **/30**

- strong, clear, tight, appropriate thesis statement
- every paragraph relates back to the thesis statement
- paragraphs flow well – continuity from paragraph to paragraph
- introduction provides lead-in to paper and thesis statement; does not start with generic statement
- conclusion indicates how the essay has progressed from point A to point B – it does not conclude with a topic completely unrelated to the introduction

STYLE **/20**

- grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- most sentences are short; longer sentences are clearly structured
- variety of vocabulary used appropriately
- variety of sentence structures
- personal flair

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES **/20**

- all citations are cited properly and consistently
- all references in the essay are provided in the bibliography
- only references used in the essay are cited
- appropriate and variety of references used (especially academic)
- more than minimum number of references used
- all citations are properly formatted and used appropriately and consistently (whether parenthetical, footnote, or endnote)
- both citations and bibliography are present

Comments:

Example of Holistic Grading Method

Essay #2

This is an excellent essay. You've been quite comprehensive, have a clear thesis, and argue persuasively. I compliment you on the various ways you inserted primary sources into your paper. This is a real research essay, and as such, is interesting to read and quite informative. I was especially impressed by the way you developed the government's attempt to "squeeze out" women as the war came to the end. The way you established that position, by use of quotations, newspaper headlines and other evidence was really well done.

In a few places the paper is a little unclear on some important issues-- why, for instance, did the "second recruitment" turn to the enlistment of married women? How did the NSS react (or did they?) to the knowledge that women were less interested in the war effort than in making money? Was this interest because of the lack of male earners to support the family? In several places, the essay provides some good WW2 and post War stats, but because it doesn't include pre 1939 figures, it's harder to understand the significance of your numbers. The paper also mentions that men were less supportive of women's work (pg 7) but doesn't back that up with specific evidence. I don't think it quite follows that unemployment leads to marriage, as suggested on pg. 10, and finally, though the point about consumerism was a good one, there's not a lot of specific evidence included to back up that position.

Nevertheless, I don't want you to get the impression that your paper was badly flawed. A lot of these are pretty minor-- I think, only the consumerism, the context for statistics and the unemployment = marriage issues really affected your overall argument.

I hope you won't mind me saying that this paper was a pleasure to read. Looking back over the comments I've given you on previous papers, it's clear that you worked quite hard on this, and have made some real strides in essay writing. Well done!

Mark: 84 (A)

Essay Evaluation Checklist for

Student _____ Assignment

Evaluator _____ Date

| Evaluation Criteria | Specific Comments/Examples |
|--|----------------------------|
| <p>Relevance of Response to the Topic (Focus): The Essay</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> responds precisely and perceptively to the topic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> responds appropriately, comprehensively and competently to the topic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> responds generally to the topic, addressing some aspects more effectively than others</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> responds incompletely and/or simplistically to the topic, or distorts the topic, thereby demonstrating a weak understanding of the subject</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> responds inappropriately or tangentially to the topic, perhaps indicating a complete lack of understanding of the topic</p> | |
| <p>Quality of Thought and Research: The Essay:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits clarity, complexity, and depth of thought about the topic, reflecting outstanding research</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits clarity and some depth of thought about the topic, reflecting competent research</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits some clarity although only minimal depth of thought about the topic, reflecting adequate but less than thorough research</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits faulty, stereotypical, or superficial thinking about the topic, reflecting insufficient or inadequate research</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits little or no evidence of effective thinking about the topic, reflecting inadequate or no research</p> | |
| <p>Organization and Development of the Response: The Essay</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits command of organization and interesting development of the topic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits control of organization and development of the topic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits some control of organization (structure may be</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>formulaic, may occasionally wander, or may be disrupted by weak transitions between points or paragraphs) and development (may contain some irrelevant or poorly chosen information) of the topic [] exhibits insufficient control of organization (may ramble, adhere to a simplistic formula or be repetitious) and development (may be mostly descriptive or may lack adequate information) of the topic [] exhibits limited or no sense of organization and/or contains little or no real substance (ideas are undeveloped, illogical, inconsistent, or based on inaccurate information) about the topic</p> | |
|---|--|

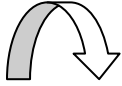
| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Quality of Expression and Style in Response: The Essay</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits command of expression (word choice, usage, tone, sentence structure and sentence sense) and style (spelling, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits control of expression and style</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits sufficient control of expression and style, committing errors that do not interfere with understanding</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits a lack of control of expression and style, committing errors that interfere with understanding</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits serious and reoccurring errors in expression and/or style that prevent understanding</p> | |
| <p>Quality of Documentation and Final Manuscript Form: The Essay</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits command of documentation and manuscript form by adhering consistently and precisely to a designated (preferably by the instructor) format (MLA, APA etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits control of documentation and manuscript form by adhering mostly (with only minor inconsistencies and imprecisions) to a designated format.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits some control of documentation and/or manuscript form by demonstrating a basic awareness of the designated format but lacking in consistency and precision</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits lack of control of documentation and manuscript form by failing to adhere to a designated format (mixes different formats or fabricates own format)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> exhibits little understanding or appreciation of documentation (references are insufficient or missing) and manuscript form (difficult to read or unprofessional)</p> | |

| Excellent | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Failure |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------|
| A+__ A__ A-__ | B+__ B__ B-__ | C+__ C__ C-__ | D+__ D__ D-__ | F__ |

Final Remarks and Recommendations for Improvement

Name: _____

Instructions: I consider the following criteria when assessing your essay, in roughly this order of importance. Be aware that if there are extreme problems in your grammar and style, it often impacts on the development of your argument. Also keep in mind that improper citation reflects directly on the Analytical content and the originality of your paper. However, to improve your essay, focus especially on parts 1-3.



STUDENTS



BOXES ON RIGHT TO BE CHECKED BY INSTRUCTOR

1. Introduction and Conclusion

- Introduces general subject of essay, then quickly narrows focus down to thesis
- Thesis statement is clear, explicit, and focused (not absent, weak, or ineffective)
- Thesis does not “repeat” the question, and contains both a *what* and *why* component
- Conclusion reflects on, but does not simply repeat the introduction, and *concludes*. (reviews the argument after the evidence has been introduced)

2. Analysis, Evidence and Development of Argument

- Discussion emphasizes analysis and avoids excessive description or summary
- Discussion shows a clear, accurate understanding of the sources used
- Arguments are supported with evidence (quotations or references) from relevant sources
- Essay makes effective use of both primary and secondary sources
- Theory and evidence are linked; the essay demonstrates the application of ideas to sources
- Quotations are introduced, contextualised, and explained adequately
- Essay defines terms where necessary
- Discussion covers all of the relevant points needed to support thesis
- Argument unfolds in logical, coherent fashion; ‘train of thought’ is easy to follow
- Discussion remains focused, and avoids irrelevant tangents and repetition
- Evidence from source is cited (parenthetically or with footnotes) as required

3. Originality and Comprehension

- Essay makes some attempt to answer the “so what” question.
- Explores evidence not discussed in tutorial and lecture
- Fresh ideas and synthesis. (“A” papers take chances)
- Paraphrases secondary sources where appropriate

4. Paragraphing

- Clear topic sentences that link your paragraphs to your thesis or stages of argument
- Sense of development (Argument builds to a conclusion)
- Paper has a smooth flow and reads well
- Paper avoids one sentence or one page paragraphs

5. Style and Grammar

- All sentences are complete (neither sentence fragments nor run-ons)
- Discussion uses formal language, and avoids jargon, clichés, and slang
- Writing avoids vague pronoun references and follows accepted grammatical conventions
- Discussion is concise, and ideas are expressed succinctly

6. Format and Conventions

- Discussion avoids contractions and other abbreviations
- Essay has been properly proofread, avoids typos, spelling errors and punctuation problems.
- Essay follows grader’s requirements for title pages, page #'s, footnotes, bibliographies, fonts and margins
- Essay meets the requirements outlined on the assignment sheet(s)

Tips for Effective Grading

- Don't change your grading policy halfway through. Have a clear policy on late work/rewrites, and make sure students know it.
- Don't offer extra credit to individuals that isn't available to all students.
- Discuss class performance and common errors before and after
- Make sure your handwriting is legible and explain your marking symbols and short forms.
- Use a green or purple pen, not a red one.
- **Always** include comments for essays. If you want students to improve, you have to do more than just write "C+" at the top of the essay or test. Moreover, students won't put any thought into improving their work if you don't yourself.
- Use both margin and end comments on essays.
- Focus on comments that will help them improve one grade, not get an "A"
- Pick an outstanding issue or two, rather than *all* of them.
- Avoid "stop by" or "come see me"-- this is a command. Try "If you come by during my office hours we can work on this."
- Keep a record of your comments.
- If space allows, use context/examples from paper to illustrate your own comments-- personalizes
- Keep students aware of progress—every semester. (Use of Excel is good, because it's quick and easy to provide feedback.) And students can't say they "didn't know" which avoids conflicts

Stylistic Issues

Effective feedback is more than telling a student where they haven't been successful. It encourages learning, rather than justifying the grade. In your basic approach, try grading as a reviewer, rather than a judge. Rather than "this is wrong," try, "here is where you can improve."

- It's a good idea to say something positive. Usually, good comments come first, but this is up to you.
- Avoid sarcasm and personal comments ("This is the stupidest essay I've ever read."). If you make a student feel stupid or that progress is hopeless, that is the end of the learning process.
- Avoid Exclamation points for negative comments. They're hard enough to read without adding emphasis.
- A good technique is to personalize positive comments ("I thought this was interesting/successful" or "You really made some good connections between x and y), and depersonalize negative ones. (i.e. "The ideas here were unclear because...") Writing something like, "Your writing is really poor" is pretty discouraging, and it doesn't tell them anything useful in any case.
- Encourage them to fix-- don't focus on failure-- i.e. "Your grammar is appalling." Rather, "This paper would have benefited from a trip to the writing centre."
- Structure comments as a reader, use your own voice (i.e. I was impressed by, or "I thought it was unfortunate that..."--gives the student the sense that you are reading and paying attention to their work.
- **Be specific.** Avoid "verbose" or "vague."-- "Vague" is guilty of its own accusation. The student doesn't know what you mean. What is vague? The idea? Sentence structure? The font?
- Structure your criticism as questions or suggestions, but in review form, not merely rhetorical statements-- i.e. "Do you think it might be a good idea to check your paper over for spelling errors next time?" Rather, "What did you think of Abella's argument that Canadians were racist?" This encourages students to make connections they may not have considered when answering questions.
- "Coach"-- provide an alternative, not show a mistake-- "Could you discuss..."

