

Criteria for Grading English Essays

The main purpose of English composition courses is to help you learn to write expository prose in such a way that a thoughtful, mature, educated reader will pay respectful attention to your ideas. The following criteria may guide your development as a writer. Note that these criteria are concerned only with measurable achievement, not with the amount of effort that goes into writing the essay.

What Characteristics Determine a Grade on an Essay?

A “C” paper demonstrates competent work; it is a success.

The “C” paper shows a clear understanding and proper execution of the assignment, but it may contain clichés, wordiness, and awkward expressions. It lacks originality and specificity. To receive a grade of “C” or better, the paper must contain:

1. An introductory paragraph with a clearly stated thesis, neither too broad nor too narrow.
2. At least three developmental paragraphs, each of which contains a topic sentence related to the thesis, concrete illustrations (examples) that support the controlling idea, and effective transitions.
3. A train of thought that shows unity and coherence.
4. A concluding paragraph.
5. Competence in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. (For example, the essay avoids sentence fragments; unnecessary shifts; subject-verb or pronoun-antecedent disagreements; dangling or split or misplaced modifiers, and fused or run-on sentences).

A “B” or an “A” essay is more than competent work. It shows a superior understanding and execution of the assignment.

The “B” paper demonstrates the competencies of the C essay in form and content. In addition, it has the following characteristics:

1. Shows originality in both style and content.
2. Has good organization, mature sentence structure, and vivid, abundant details. All generalities (opinions) are supported.
3. Has a well-chosen vocabulary and appropriate choice of words.
4. Has no serious errors in mechanics, grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

The “A” paper

1. Contains original ideas that are exceptionally rich.
2. Has supporting details that are unusually vivid and strikingly appropriate.

3. Shows awareness of the exact meanings of the vocabulary used.
4. Contains sentences that have force, fluency, and elegance. No words are wasted.
5. Shows skill in using coordination, subordination, and parallelism.
6. Has no serious mechanical errors in grammar or spelling.
7. Is unique.

A “D” or an “F” essay is less than competent work. It shows a lack of understanding and/or proper execution of the assignment.

The “D” paper has many of the following characteristics:

1. Lacks the qualities of the “C” essay.
2. Has a trite thesis that is too broad or too narrow,
3. Has insufficient evidence for the thesis and the subordinate opinions.
4. Has an unclear organizational pattern and underdeveloped paragraphs.
5. Contains errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

The “F” paper has many of the following characteristics:

1. Does not respond to the assignment.
2. Contains a trivial thesis.
3. May be only a collection of loosely related opinions.
4. Shows a poor grasp of paragraph organization.
5. Has many errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.