

## **A Guide to Assigning Grades to Written Assignments**

These grading standards establish four major criteria for evaluating written assignments: purpose, reasoning and content, organization, and presentation. Of course, not every paper will fit neatly into one grade category; a paper may, for instance, have some characteristics of B paper and some of C paper. The final grade it receives depends on the weight the instructor gives each criterion.

### **"A" Papers**

The A paper has not only fulfilled the assignment, but has done so in a fresh and mature manner. It has effectively met the needs of the rhetorical situation, it makes a substantial contribution to the situation, and it is likely to move the audience to act as the writer desires.

The evidence is detailed; the sources of information have been used creatively and cited appropriately. The reasoning is valid. Beyond that, the paper is thoughtful, showing hard work, good judgment, and sensitivity to the complexities of the situation or issue.

The organization is effective for the audience and purpose. The introduction establishes the context and purpose of the communication. Segments, whether sections or paragraphs, are fully developed and follow logically from what precedes them. Headings and subheadings are appropriately used. The conclusion is suitable in tone and strategy.

The prose is not only clear and readable but also occasionally apt and memorable. It contains few errors, none of which seriously undermines the effectiveness of the paper for educated readers.

### **"B" Papers**

The assignment has not just been followed but fulfilled. In taking its stand, the paper shows a clear sense of audience and purpose. It shows more awareness of the implications of what it is saying and of its assumptions about the audience than the C paper does.

The writer has not settled for the most obvious evidence. The B paper is characterized by thoroughness. The reasoning is more than adequate. Not only does it make no mistakes, but also it shows thoughtfulness and some awareness of complexities and other points of view.

The B paper has an effective introduction and conclusion. The order of information is logical, and the reader can follow it because of well-chosen transitions. Paragraph divisions are logical, and the paragraphs use enough specific detail to make their point tellingly.

The expression is competent, more ambitious than that of the C paper, less felicitous than that of the A paper. Not only is sentence structure correct, but it also uses subordination, emphasis, sentence length and variety, and modifiers effectively. It would be surprising to find serious sentence errors—comma splices, fragments, or fused sentences—in a B paper. Word choice is idiomatic, vocabulary precise. Punctuation, grammar, and spelling conform to the conventions of edited American English.

### **"C" Papers**

The assignment has been followed. The paper develops its points with a sense of audience.

The information and degree of persuasion in a C paper is appropriate. There is evidence and though the evidence is perhaps obvious and easily accessible, it has been gathered honestly and used responsibly. The C paper may exhibit some minor imperfections or inconsistencies in mapping out the arguments, but there are no major flaws in its reasoning.

The organization is clear. The reader could easily outline the presentation. Paragraphs have adequate development and are divided appropriately. Transitions may be mechanical, but they foster coherence.

The expression is competent. Sentence structure is generally correct, although it may show limited competence with such elements as subordination, emphasis, sentence variety, sentence length, and modifiers. It relies instead on simple and compound sentences. The paper is generally free of comma splices, unintentional fragments, and fused sentences. Word choice is correct though limited. It may contain errors in spelling, mechanics, and grammar.

### **"D" Papers**

A D paper attempts to follow the assignment, even if the choice of topic or situation is poor, whether too broad, too narrow, or inappropriate. A D paper often shows a poor sense of audience and purpose. For example, it may over or under-estimate the audience's prior knowledge or assumptions. Or it may correctly assess the situation, but add little of substance to it.

Necessary evidence may be missing, irrelevant evidence present, or the interpretation or evaluation of that evidence may be inadequate. The reasoning may be seriously flawed, resting on an insufficient understanding of the situation or the audience. Or it may rely too heavily on evidence from published sources without adding original analysis.

Organization may be significantly flawed in any of the following ways: relevant segments may be missing; topic sentences may be absent or inappropriate to the content of the paragraph; paragraphs are not well developed, divided or arranged; transitions are missing or incorrect; introductions or conclusions are missing or incomplete.

A D paper may have numerous and consistent errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The syntax or diction in some sentences may be so flawed that they are incomprehensible. Lack of proofreading can turn an otherwise adequate paper into a D paper.

### **"F" Papers**

The F paper may have not answered the question posed in the assignment, even if it is correctly and coherently written. (Many instructors require that such papers be rewritten before assigning a grade.) It relates to the assignment but has no clear purpose, or goes off in several directions.

It is missing essential elements of the assigned form of communication. It falls seriously short of the minimum length requirements.

It may be plagiarized—either it is someone else's paper or it has used sources improperly or without documentation.

It is plagued by more than one of the organizational deficiencies of the D paper. Numerous and consistent errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, or syntax seriously hinder communication.

From Diane Enerson, R. Neill Johnson, Susannah Milner and Karthryn Plank, *The Penn State Teacher II: Learning to Teach; Teaching to Learn*. (University Park, PA: Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Penn State University, 1997).