

Essay grade descriptions: A

An "A" represents an excellent essay.

Idea / Thesis

- The essay communicates breadth and depth of understanding of the source text.
- The thesis communicates an original idea, or a fresh perspective on a familiar idea.
- The essay represents intellectual or creative risk, and a consistent commitment to that risk.
- The assertion is logical. The reasoning is clear and insightful
- Support is thorough, relevant, and clearly developed. No example is "bent" or taken out of context in order to fit the argument.

Structure

- The structure and organization of the essay is solid, logical, consistently realized, and appropriate to the thesis.
- Points are thoroughly developed with no repetition.
- The quantity of text for a given point is consistent with the relevance of that point. Major and minor points are distinguishable.
- Transitions between major and minor points are fluid and graceful without creating a distraction.
- Quotations are introduced and integrated fluidly and effectively, with correct format and punctuation.

Diction and Style

- Vocabulary is rich, vivid, and original. Cliché is effectively avoided.
- Sophisticated and appropriate language is used effectively and aesthetically.
- The style is appropriately formal but welcoming. Style is consistent throughout the essay and contributes to the author's intellectual credibility.

Mechanics

- The essay is virtually free of mechanical errors.
- The syllabus and MLA guidelines are correctly followed.

Tendencies

"A" papers are often surprising. They present "Oh my gosh" moments to the writer and to the reader. Essays at this level usually develop not merely from attempts to do what is expected, but more often from enthusiastic attempts to do justice to a strong and original idea.

Essay grade descriptions: B

A "B" represents a good essay. Therefore, a "B+" is a very good grade and is worthy of pride.

Idea / Thesis

- The essay communicates an understanding of the source text, and a depth of understanding of those portions relevant to the thesis.
- The thesis communicates a valid and logical idea. There is some degree of originality.
- The essay represents some intellectual or creative risk, but commitment to that risk may be inconsistent.
- The assertion is logical. The reasoning is clear.
- Support is reasoned and appropriate.

Structure

- The structure and organization of the essay is solid, logical. Sometimes "B" essays fit the idea to the structure rather than developing a structure that grows from the idea.
- Points are thoroughly developed with little repetition.
- The quantity of text for a given point is generally consistent with the relevance of that point. Major and minor points are distinguishable.
- Transitions between major and minor points are present without creating a distraction.
- Quotations are usually introduced and integrated fluidly and effectively, with correct format and punctuation.

Diction and Style

- The vocabulary is effective and varied. Cliché is avoided.
- A formal tone is consistently maintained.

Mechanics

- The essay is generally free of mechanical errors.
- The syllabus and MLA guidelines are generally followed.

Tendencies:

Some words that we associate with "B" work are "solid," "good job," "well done," and the like. A student is well served by being proud of a "B," and especially a "B+."

Essay grade descriptions: C

A "C" represents a passing or "okay" essay.

Idea / Thesis

- The essay communicates an understanding of the source text, but that understanding is mostly literal and fairly shallow.
- The thesis communicates a familiar idea. The logic may be flawed.
- The essay represents little if any intellectual or creative risk, and commitment to that risk is inconsistent.
- Support is present but is sometimes irrelevant or is otherwise not clearly tied to the thesis.

Structure

- Organized structure is present but forced - ideas are made to fit a preconceived organization system with little concern for flow or logic.
- Points are inconsistently developed.
- The quantity of text for a given point is occasionally inconsistent with the relevance of that point. Major and minor points are not always distinguishable.
- Transitions between major and minor points are not present or create a distraction.
- Quotations are not consistently introduced or integrated, with occasional incorrect format and punctuation.

Diction and Style

- The vocabulary is ordinary and unoriginal.
- There are occasional lapses in appropriate tone.

Mechanics

- Technical and mechanical errors create a distraction from the ideas presented.
- Technical and mechanical errors undermine the writer's credibility.
- A lack of careful proofreading and revising is apparent.
- The syllabus and MLA guidelines are occasionally followed.

Tendencies:

A "C" can sometimes represent hard work by a student for whom English is a difficult subject. Often, however, a "C" represents an effort to merely get the assignment done. Sometimes a student will work very hard on the essay but will have undermined his or her essay through inadequate study of the source text.

Many students should be disappointed and challenged by a "C," but not all. Some students have every right to be proud of a well-earned "C."

Essay grade descriptions: D

A "D" represents a poor essay.

Idea / Thesis

- The essay communicates an inadequate or incorrect understanding of the source text,
- A thesis is present, but is weak, significantly flawed in its reasoning, or exhibits little or no original thinking.
- The essay represents no intellectual or creative risk, or exhibits risk for its own sake and not to further a larger idea.
- The body of the essay is inconsistent with the ideas presented in the thesis.
- Support is present but is irrelevant or is otherwise not clearly related to the thesis.

Structure

- There is no organizational structure (often evidenced by the lack of paragraph breaks), or the structure is inconsistent with the thesis.
- Major and minor points are often undeveloped.
- The essay lacks transitions between ideas.
- Quotations are not introduced or integrated. Incorrect format and punctuation is used on many quotations.

Diction and Style

- The vocabulary is ordinary, unoriginal, and occasionally inappropriate to the tone or subject.
- There are consistent lapses in appropriate tone.

Mechanics

- Technical and mechanical errors create a significant distraction from the ideas presented.
- Technical and mechanical errors seriously undermine the writer's credibility.
- A lack of careful proofreading and revising is apparent.
- The syllabus and MLA guidelines are not followed consistently.

Tendencies:

If this grade is consistently earned, the student must address a significant problem in either his skills or his work habits. If a student earns more than one "D" in a quarter, there is a significant problem in one of these areas:

1. The student's ability or willingness to read, interpret, or analyze literature.
2. The student's ability to generate and develop ideas for an essay.
3. The student's ability to use correct grammar, mechanics, and organization when writing.

Essay grade descriptions: F

An "F" represents a failed essay.

Idea / Thesis

- The essay communicates a significant misunderstanding of the source text,
- A thesis, if present, is illogical or significantly flawed.
- The essay represents no intellectual or creative risk or effort.
- The body of the essay is inconsistent with the ideas presented in the thesis.
- Support, if present, is irrelevant. The source text is significantly misunderstood or is manipulated to support illogical conclusions.

Structure

- There is no apparent organizational structure.
- Major and minor points are undeveloped or unfocussed.
- There are virtually no transitions.

Diction and Style

- The vocabulary is ordinary, unoriginal, and occasionally inappropriate to the tone or subject.
- There are consistent lapses in appropriate tone.

Mechanics

- Technical and mechanical errors are abundant. They create a major distraction from the ideas presented.
- Technical and mechanical errors result in the writer having little credibility.
- A lack of careful proofreading and revising is apparent.
- The syllabus and MLA guidelines are not followed.

Tendencies:

A student should not take a failing grade personally. An "F" is rare and should be taken as a significant signal to the student that much extra time and effort needs to be spent on this subject. A prompt meeting with the instructor is mandatory, followed by a rewrite within one week. A plan of action should be made, including several conferences with the instructor during the course of the next writing assignment.

