What the Grades Typically Mean

A: Excellent in all or nearly all aspects. The interest of the reader is engaged by the ideas and presentation. Style and organization seem natural and easy. Paper marked by originality of ideas.

B: Technically competent, with a lapse here and there. The thesis is clear, properly limited, and reasonable, and the prose is generally effective without rising to sustained distinction.

C: A competent piece of work but not yet good. C papers are more or less adequately organized along obvious lines, and the thesis tends to be oversimple or imprudent without being wildly implausible. Monotony of sentence structure is apparent, and errors are sprinkled throughout. In some C papers, excellent ideas are marred by poor presentation—either development, organization, or technical errors. In other C papers, the organization, structure, and grammar are not flawed, but the ideas and how they are developed need work. In yet other C papers, there are only a few technical errors and the organization and ideas are adequate but not noteworthy. In college, a “C” paper is fine.

D: A piece of work that demonstrates some effort on the author’s part, but that is too marred by technical problems and/or flaws in thinking and development of ideas to be considered competent work.

F: This is a failing grade. The work seems hasty and sloppy; it demonstrates minimal effort on the author’s part. Plagiarism also falls into this category. Generally, the paper was not a sincere attempt.

Specific Criteria I Use In Grading Papers

Focus:
- Is the paper’s argument/topic focused enough to be covered adequately within the space of the paper?
  - *A clear thesis statement provides an argument that guides the information presented in the paper. The thesis statement directly addresses the question posed in the paper topic.

Organization:
- Is the paper’s structure apparent and easy to follow?

Development:
- Does the paper…
  - … adequately introduce the topic?
  - … present a logical argument?
  - … present convincing evidence to support the writer’s position?
  - … consider counterarguments?
  - … summarize findings?
  - … offer a reasonable conclusion?

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1 Much of this material is adapted from Tools For Teaching by Barbara Gross Davis.
… engage the reader?
… offer creative/original ideas?

**Sentence and Paragraph Structure:**
- Are sentences…
  - … well formed?
  - … appropriately varied in length and style?
  - … used for different effects?
- Do the paragraphs hold together?

**Mechanics:**
- Is the paper generally free of spelling, typographical, and grammatical errors?

**Following Directions:**
- Does the paper follow other directions specific to the assignment?

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**A checklist for students, prior to turning in the assignment:**

- I revised this paper at least once.
- I spent at least five hours\(^2\) on this paper.
- I started work on this paper at least three days ago.
- I have tried hard to do my best work on this paper.
- I proofread this paper at least twice for grammar and punctuation.
- I asked at least one other person to proofread the paper.
- I ran the paper through a spelling check.

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\(^2\) This is probably far less than the time needed for many assignments.