

STATISTICS IN THE REAL WORLD: GRADING RUBRIC¹
Jo Hardin Fall 2018

The below grading rubric should give you a sense of how I grade papers. If you don't understand a grade from my comments, please come and talk to me about it!

There is a line between work that achieves minimum goals for papers in this class and work that does not – that line is between a B- and a C+. Essays that have an arguable thesis and a progressive, logical structure fall above that line (unless other problems are so egregious that they seriously damage the paper's quality), and typically receive grades in the B or A range. Essays that do not have both an arguable thesis and a logical, progressive structure fall below that line, and typically receive grades in the C range or below.

AN ESSAY MERITING A GRADE OF A is both ambitious and successful. It presents a strong, interesting argument with grace and confidence. It includes:

- an interesting, arguable thesis that is sufficiently limited in scope, presented early and developed throughout the essay;
- a logical, progressive structure that takes the reader on a journey, developing, complicating, and expanding the initial thesis by considering counter-arguments; strong and clear links between points, and well-organized paragraphs;
- sufficient, appropriate, and interesting evidence, presented in a readable and understandable way;
- original and insightful analysis, that shows how the evidence supports the thesis, and that goes beyond summary or paraphrase;
- sources that are deployed in a range of ways (to motivate and support the argument, provide key-terms, and so on); that have been selected carefully; and that are quoted and cited correctly; and
- a style that is both conversational and sophisticated; that uses diction appropriate to the subject matter and the audience; that engages and stimulates the reader.

AN ESSAY MERITING A B is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. It exhibits one or more of the following features:

- a thesis that may be arguable but vague, uninteresting, or fragmentary; it may be dropped in places;
- a structure that proceeds logically most of the time or in general, but is periodically confusing due to missing links or large intellectual leaps; it might be overly predictable and undeveloped, with few complications; it may include disorganized paragraphs;
- evidence that is generally solid but may be thin in places, or might be presented without analysis (as undigested quotation);
- analysis that is generally insightful but sometimes either simply summary or entirely absent; that makes inconsistent or illogical connections between evidence and thesis;

¹with thanks to the Dara Regaignon

- sources that are quoted and cited correctly (for the most part) but are deployed in limited ways?as a straw person or as simple confirmation of the author’s viewpoint, for example;
- a style that is clear but lacking in sophistication; or that is weighed down by inappropriately fancy diction; may demonstrate some errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and format.

AN ESSAY MERITING A GRADE OF C has significant problems in articulating and presenting its argument. Its features include one or more of the following:

- a thesis that is descriptive or confusing; that has multiple parts that are only superficially tied together;
- a structure that is confusing (making huge, unmotivated intellectual leaps) or predictable (a list or a “five-paragraph essay?”); that includes few complications or counter-arguments; that exhibits disorganized, often overly descriptive, paragraphs;
- insufficient evidence, often presented without analysis as undigested quotations; may be taken out of context;
- analysis that has moments of insight but is generally missing or simply summary;
- sources that are not adequately situated or explained; that may be quoted and cited incorrectly; that are used simply as filler or as affirmation of the author’s viewpoint;
- a style that is difficult to read or overly simplistic; perhaps including errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and format.

A D-RANGE ESSAY may grapple with ideas or sources but generally does so superficially; it may fail to address the expectations of the assignment. Its features include:

- a thesis that is missing or purely descriptive (un-arguable), or that is a total misreading;
- a structure that is confusing, demonstrating little focused development; disorganized paragraphs; plot summary;
- evidence that is scanty or absent; when present, it is chiefly undigested quotation and/or taken out of context;
- analysis that is absent, based on misinterpretations of the evidence, or mere summary;
- sources that are absent or, if present, are not adequately situated or explained, incorrectly quoted and/or cited, and/or used as filler;
- a style that is simplistic or difficult to read, and is probably riddled with technical errors.

A failing essay is usually significantly shorter than the assigned length; it addresses the assignment superficially but doesn’t attempt to offer any original insight; while it may cite sources, it fails to engage either sources or ideas.

An essay that is less than half the assigned length and does not fulfill the basic expectations of the assignment does not count as successful completion of the assignment and earns a “0.” Such an essay puts its author in jeopardy of failing the course.