

Grading Writing: Standards of the Wellesley College Writing Program

We begin with the “B,” the standard grade given for competent writing in the Writing Program. In accordance with the Wellesley College grading standards, a “B” paper “attain[s] . . . excellence in not all, but some of the following: organization, accuracy, originality, understanding, insight” (*Articles of Government*, Book II, Art. VII, Sec. 1).

A “B” paper:

- Introduces the reader clearly and directly to the topic to be discussed and the position the author is taking with respect to the material.
- Follows a clear line of inquiry and/or argument (with equally clear organization).
- Demonstrates that the author has given the matter serious thought, and wishes to convey the results of that thought to the reader.
- Considers evidence thoroughly and well; demonstrates how conclusions follow from the evidence.
- Makes good use of paragraph structure and transitional sentences to convey the argument to the reader.
- Cites source material adequately, smoothly, and correctly.
- Expresses thoughts in clear, readable sentences; word choice is good.
- Is generally free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

If you do exactly what your professor asks of you, and do it well, we believe that work is worthy of a B.

An “A” paper exceeds expectations, demonstrating notable thought, craft, and excellence of expression. No professor can tell you how to turn your paper into an A paper; the A comes from a quality that a student injects into the thinking and writing through her own combination of perspiration and inspiration. Specifically, the “A” paper:

- Demonstrates a commanding grasp of the subject matter. The writer indicates through the content and tone of her writing that she has seriously examined the material and carefully reflected on the implications of her position. In short, this writer will not only communicate effectively but also inspire her readers to trust and respect her ideas and judgment.
- Carefully and intelligently analyzes primary sources, adequately examines the subtleties and implications of the evidence and clarifies precisely how the evidence justifies the writer’s assertion. It is not enough to say that something can be interpreted in a particular way. The writer must specifically justify why her interpretation is compelling and convincing. Finally, the relationship of the evidence to the claim must be clear.
- Starting with the title, the paper engages readers. In the introduction, the writer skillfully orients the reader to the material, indicating the issue (thesis) at stake and the direction the writer’s argument will take. Put simply, the writing must be clear and

engaging.

- Offers compelling and insightful arguments that are clarified and supported with suitable evidence—from beginning to end of the essay.
- Is logically organized. The reader should get the sense that the paragraphs are in exactly the right order as dictated by the material. Moreover, the writer needs to use appropriate transitions to clarify the movement in logic from one idea to the next.
- The writing must be fluent and graceful. How things are said must contribute to the reader's enjoyment and punctuate the writer's argument.
- The writer must have an appropriate feel for the language, which results in suitable word choices.
- Concludes with a bang, not a whimper. The reader feels that something important has been communicated and some clarity brought to a complex issue.
- Is free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

A "C" paper:

- Has some structure, but more often seems to satisfy an empty formula. It has an introduction, body, and conclusion, but does not yet have a clear argument that seems to be the author's own.
- Has a "one-note" thesis. "Proves" a single (often obvious) point, but doesn't consider alternative points or complicating factors; sometimes hammers the evidence to fit a pre-conceived point.
- Information is thin. The author has not adequately addressed the data. Sometimes this thinness is manifest in short, undeveloped paragraphs.
- Demonstrates some awkwardness of language: overly simple (or overly elaborate) sentence structure; inappropriately used words.
- Demonstrates only a thin grasp of the material or methods of the course.
- Reports rather than analyzes the material.
- Is inadequately researched, and uses citation methods carelessly.
- Has errors in grammar, punctuation and/or word choice.

Please note that papers that are filled with errors (of language, of logic, or of content) or where sources are inadequately or too carelessly cited cannot receive a passing grade in a course.

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Qs??? Ann Velenchik
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