

## A Short Guide to Grading Student Papers

In measuring the quality of student papers, apart from questions of the quality of their content, instructors in any discipline should also insist that the writing meet certain minimum requirements. These requirements cover three aspects of writing:

1. **Structure** encompasses the focus, organization, and development of the paper. Structure is largely a product of effective **Pre-writing** or planning.
2. **Style** encompasses words, clauses, phrases, sentences which express ideas clearly and coherently. Effective style is largely a product of effective **Re-writing** or revising.
3. **Copy Editing** encompasses the **Final Stage** of the writing process as writers check for errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, manuscript form, etc.

Based upon these three categories of requirements, the English Department has agreed upon the following grading criteria or measures of superior, average, and unacceptable papers. These criteria are employed in all English composition classes.

<b>Superior (A or B) Grade</b>		
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Copy-Editing</b>
<p><b>UNITY:</b> The paper has a significant, clearly defined, and limited topic. The paper not only stays with the topic throughout the essay, but gives a sense of completeness. The sense of unity and completeness is reiterated at the paragraph level.</p> <p><b>ORDER:</b> The paper is planned so that it progresses by clearly ordered and necessary stages that are easily followed and comprehended, without the reader having to flip pages or go backwards and forwards to follow the logic.</p> <p><b>DEVELOPMENT:</b> Overall and in the individual paragraphs, the paper consistently attends to detail with appropriate proportion and emphasis. Ideas/claims/generalities/inferences are supported with concrete, substantial, and relevant detail.</p>	<p><b>COHERENCE:</b> All parts of the paper are connected with readily comprehended links: sections, paragraphs, sentences are all linked by explicit transitions.</p> <p><b>SENTENCES:</b> Sentences are skillfully constructed: coherent, emphatic, effectively varied.</p> <p><b>DICTION:</b> Words are distinctive: precise, appropriate, economical.</p>	<p><b>SENTENCE FORM:</b> No more than two major errors (fragments, comma splices, fused sentences) in the whole essay.</p> <p><b>SPELLING:</b> Few errors encountered, aside from a few typos.</p> <p><b>PUNCTUATION:</b> No more than one minor error per page.</p> <p><b>GRAMMAR:</b> Very few, if any, errors: disagreements between subjects and verbs or pronouns and antecedents, dangling modifiers, faulty parallelism, etc. Format standards, like manuscript or citation requirements, are also carefully met.</p>

<b>ACCEPTABLE (C) GRADE</b>		
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Copy-Editing</b>
<p><b>UNITY:</b> The paper has a limited topic and stays on that topic, but the central topic is not as significant as the A or B paper's.</p> <p><b>ORDER:</b> The paper presents the topic in an orderly way which readers can follow without getting lost. But the order is not always the most logical or readable.</p> <p><b>DEVELOPMENT:</b> Ideas are developed with occasional disproportion or inappropriate emphasis. Ideas are supported with concrete detail that occasionally may be repetitious, irrelevant, or vague.</p>	<p><b>COHERENCE:</b> The parts of the paper are connected, so that readers only rarely encounter gaps in thought or become confused. Paragraphs are generally coherent with transitional links among sentences and between paragraphs.</p> <p><b>SENTENCES:</b> Sentences are constructed for clarity but often lack the variety and emphasis of superior papers.</p> <p><b>DICTION:</b> Clear and appropriate word choice. But the words selected are not always as vivid or precise as they might be.</p>	<p><b>SENTENCE FORM:</b> There are some errors in sentence form, e.g., fragments, comma splices, or fused sentences. (No more than 3 in EN 111 or 2 in EN 112.) The sentences lack the distinct skill of a superior paper.</p> <p><b>SPELLING:</b> There may be more than one spelling error per page.</p> <p><b>PUNCTUATION:</b> There may be a few minor errors per page (presuming comma splices and fused sentences are major errors).</p> <p><b>GRAMMAR:</b> Errors may be found throughout but no more than one per page, e.g., disagreements between subject and verb or pronoun and antecedent, faulty parallelism, wrong verb or pronoun case. Although the average or merely acceptable essay often has various errors of format and proofreading, they should not be excessive.</p>

<b>Unacceptable (D or F) Grade</b>		
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Copy-Editing</b>
<p><b>UNITY:</b> The paper lacks a clearly defined and limited topic. Or the central idea is vaguely expressed. The paper does not hold together overall or in the paragraphs.</p> <p><b>ORDER:</b> The plan or sequencing of the parts of the essay is not clear. The ideas appear without clear purpose or necessity.</p> <p><b>DEVELOPMENT:</b> The Central idea, subordinate ideas, claims/inferences/generalities in various paragraphs lack supporting data. Development, while not totally absent, is frequently irrelevant, redundant, or inconsistent.</p>	<p><b>COHERENCE:</b> Parts of the paper -- especially paragraphs and sentences -- are unconnected.</p> <p><b>SENTENCES:</b> Sentences rarely vary with skillful choice to enhance emphasis or coherence. When correct, sentences often ramble or manifest an immature reliance upon simple sentences.</p> <p><b>DICTION:</b> Word choice is, as a rule, inappropriate, vague, unidiomatic, or sub-standard.</p>	<p><b>SENTENCE FORM:</b> Sentences evidence an excessive number of major errors: fragments, comma splices, fused sentences.</p> <p><b>SPELLING:</b> Numerous spelling errors (affecting different words and not merely the same word consistently wrong) per page.</p> <p><b>PUNCTUATION:</b> Multiple punctuation errors per page.</p> <p><b>GRAMMAR:</b> Multiple grammar errors per page. Unacceptable papers are also characterized by improper format and poor copy-editing.</p>
<p><b>NOTE:</b> It may appear to be permissive to allow any errors per page in copy-editing. The rationale is that even the most careful writer makes some slips here. We cannot exact of students a perfection most of us recognize as probably attainable only in the state of beatitude.</p>		