Letter Grades

To determine a numerical grade from letter grades, I follow this formula: A straight grade (“A,” “B”) becomes a “5.” In other words, an “A” becomes a 95, a “B” becomes 85, and so on. Pluses will translate into “8” and minuses into “2.” Therefore, a “C-” equals 72, and a “D+” equals 68. If a grade is given on an essay as “C-/D+,” the numerical equivalent is 70, which is midway between 72 and 68. An “F” earns 55 points. Non-submission of an essay earns a grade of zero (0) points.

Grading Criteria

In this class, we are working on developing and improving your writing competence in four major areas: focus, development, organization, and style. Although the description following each criterion will change slightly as we write different types of essays, the basic criteria remain the same.

“A” essays are very nearly perfect in every way and satisfy the following four criteria:

1. Focus—These essays have a clear focus on a main idea, thesis, or claim. This focus is made clear in one well-worded thesis statement. The writer’s purposes are appropriate for the writing situation. Promises made to the reader early in the essay are kept. Expectations for the reader are set and then met. Ideas, examples, and reasons developed in the body of the essay are clearly related to the main idea.

2. Development--These essays have ample supporting evidence such as sensory details, specific examples, statistics, quotations, or other data. The writer’s assertions are immediately followed by supporting evidence. The writer shows rather than tells. Appropriate evidence (personal experience, interviews, surveys, library and Internet sources) supports the writer’s main idea, thesis, or claim. The writer shows how or why the evidence is relevant to the main idea or claim.

3. Organization--The ideas and paragraphs are organized in some logical and apparent sequence or order. Each sentence logically follows the previous sentence, and each paragraph logically follows the previous paragraph. The writer uses sufficient transitional elements to let the reader know what has been discussed, what is being discussed, and what will be discussed. Attention-getting titles and lead-ins, a helpful introductory paragraph, thesis statements and essay map sentences, summary and forecasting statements, paragraph hooks, transition words and phrases, and an effective conclusion guide the reader from beginning to end.

4. Style—These essays have appropriate voice and tone as well as effective sentences and word choice that are suitable for the essay's purpose and audience. In addition, these essays avoid problems in usage, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling that interfere with the writer’s ideas or distract from the audience’s pleasure in reading. The use of author tags, quotation marks, and in-text citations appropriately identifies quotations. Quotations are not "dumped" (dropped into the paper to stand alone); instead, they are clearly and smoothly connected to the writer's own words and thought processes. Paraphrases are correctly identified by the use of author tags and in-text citations. The writer has proofread the paper thoroughly, and it has a minimum of careless errors (such as repetition or omission of words, to name only two possibilities).
“B” essays just miss the mark and are deficient in one or more of the following criteria:

1. Focus—These essays have a clear focus on a main idea, thesis, or claim, but some deficiencies in focus may exist. Most promises made to the reader are fulfilled, and the overall purpose is still clear.
2. Development—These essays develop the main idea with good supporting evidence, but types of support may be thin or deficient in spots, or some ideas are not explored thoroughly. Overall, the relevant evidence supports assertions or general statements.
3. Organization—The ideas and paragraphs are organized in some logical and apparent sequence or pattern. Occasional deficiencies in transitions from point to point exist, but the overall shape is clear to the reader.
4. Style—Typically, these essays communicate the main idea with good organization and support, but the voice or tone may be off or a few deficiencies in sentence structure, word choice, grammar, or punctuation exist. Proofreading, if done, was not done thoroughly.

“C” essays fulfill the assignment but do not shine as extraordinary; typically, they are deficient in two or more of the criteria:

1. Focus—These essays begin with a clear focus on a main idea, thesis, or claim, but the focus shifts at some point in the essay.
2. Development—Typically, the main idea has some supporting evidence, but some evidence is not relevant or some assertions or statements are left unsupported. In addition, some ideas that should have been named and explored have been omitted.
3. Organization—Often an overall pattern or sequence of organization may exist, but the writer has made little effort to guide the reader through the major ideas with the use of helpful transitional words and phrases, paragraph hooks, or explanatory sentences.
4. Style—Sometimes these essays have a lackluster, dull tone, appearing to be written mechanically to fulfill an assignment rather than directed to a specific audience. Distracting sentence, word choice, grammar, or punctuation errors may interfere with communication. There is little evidence that the essay was proofread.

“D” essays are deficient in three of the four criteria or have one major flaw that seriously disrupts communication.

“F” essays are deficient in every way. Typically, they are little more than rough drafts that do not meet the requirements of the writing situation, or they have major flaws that interfere with the communication process.