

Grading Rubric: What makes for an A paper?

The Superior Paper (A/A-)

- Thesis: The thesis statement is easily identifiable, plausible, clear, insightful, sophisticated, and either appears in the first section of the paper or as a statement of purpose with a solid conclusion.
- Argument: A sophisticated and analytical argument, first expressed in the thesis statement, is maintained throughout the paper. All ideas in the paper flow logically and relate back to the main argument. Counterarguments in the historiography are acknowledged and, where possible, refuted.
- Organization: The organization of the paper is appropriate to the thesis and is clear, with forecasting, topic sentences, and concluding sentences that relate back to the thesis. Transitions between points are smooth.
- Use of evidence: Primary source information must be used to support every point with at least one example. These examples must support the topic sentence (and thesis) and fit within the paragraph. Quoted material should be integrated well into the sentences and interpreted in the students' own words. When called for, secondary sources should be used correctly.
- Historical Sensibility: The paper either shows change over time or the sense that it is analyzing a particular historical moment. If it is a research project, the paper situates its argument well in the relevant historiography.
- Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction are excellent; punctuation is used correctly; minimal to no spelling errors; no run-on sentences or awkward constructions; limited use of the passive voice; correct and consistent citation style and bibliography/ works cited page.
- Creativity/Originality: The paper should do more than cover the class material or present a solid exposition of the topic. A true A paper should show creativity and original thought.

The Good Paper (B+/B/B-)

- Thesis: The thesis statement is identifiable with work, is plausible, and either appears in the first section of the paper or as a statement of purpose with a reasonably solid conclusion. It is solid, though may not be original, insightful, or sophisticated.
- Argument: A solid argument, first expressed in the thesis statement, is maintained throughout the paper. It may not be equally clear in all sections, especially for the B- paper.
- Organization: The organization of the paper is present, though not always clear, especially for the B-. Some of the following elements are present: forecasting, topic sentences, and concluding sentences that relate back to the thesis.
- Use of evidence: There is some primary source information present, but it doesn't always support the thesis. Secondary sources are sometimes used in place of primary sources.

- Historical Sensibility: The paper either shows change over time or the sense that it is analyzing a particular historical moment. If it is a research project, the use of historiography is less sophisticated than an A paper.
- Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction are good; punctuation is used mostly correctly; minimal spelling errors; no run-on sentences but some awkward constructions; consistent citation style and bibliography/ works cited page.
- Creativity/Originality: A B+ paper might be technically good, but do no more than cover the class material or present a solid exposition of the topic.

The “Needs Help” Paper (C+/C/C-)

- Thesis: Thesis is unclear (though present) or doesn’t accurately represent what the paper is really about.
- Argument: The argument doesn’t really drive the paper – these are frequent grades for papers that do more plot summary than analysis.
- Organization: The organization is muddy or wandering. There are no topic sentences to let the reader know what to expect.
- Use of evidence: Primary source information is present, but there are problems of quantity or use. Large block quotes are left to stand on their own. Secondary sources are sometimes used in place of primary sources.
- Historical Sensibility: Sometimes the C paper shows historical sensibility, but this is the highest grade a paper with no historical sensibility could achieve.
- Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction are poor; punctuation is used mostly incorrectly; spelling errors; run-on sentences, awkward constructions; some citations present. The paper needs serious proofreading.
- Creativity/Originality: Even a creative paper without a strong thesis cannot score higher than a C+.

The Truly Needy Paper (D+/D/D-)

- Thesis: No apparent thesis or thesis is very difficult to understand.
- Argument: The paper wanders or gives only a summary of the book(s) involved. No real argument is made, but material from the class is discussed.
- Organization: The organization is confusing and unclear, typically because the thesis is nonexistent.
- Use of evidence: No primary source information is present.
- Historical Sensibility: Typically minimal historical sensibility is shown.
- Mechanics: There are rampant problems with all aspects of mechanics. There are no citations.
- Creativity/Originality: Even the most creative paper without a thesis and primary sources cannot score higher than a D.

The Failing Paper

It is difficult to fail an assignment that has been completed. The failing paper shows a distinct lack of effort. It has no identifiable thesis or deals in no way with the class material.

Adapted from a internet post by Patrick Rael <prael@polar.Bowdoin.EDU>, " Re: what to say to students", [H-Teach@msu.net], 2 April 1996