

ESSAY GRADING CRITERIA

The following criteria are intended as guidelines for faculty members and as explanations for students. Their purpose is to ensure a uniform grading standard across the Department of English Studies and to ensure that students understand what the full range of grades means. These criteria reflect the Department's understanding that university essays must combine quality of thought, clarity and correctness of expression, and an adherence to the discipline's standards of scholarly presentation.

A: 100-80% = Excellent

The grade of "A" indicates an *exceptional, outstanding performance*. The essay develops a clear, interesting, and significant thesis mainly from primary sources; when secondary material is used, it is used intelligently and judiciously, not as a substitute for the student's own thinking. The essay manifests the student's mastery of the skills of literary criticism; depending on the nature of the specific assignment, these skills may include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- the development of a clear, persuasive, analytical argument based on textual evidence
- a thorough knowledge of generic and formal conventions
- a thorough knowledge of prose and verse technique
- a thorough knowledge of historical context
- the ability to demonstrate a necessary connection between a text's formal features and its thematic concerns
- a thorough understanding of the critical and theoretical focus of the specific course for which the assignment is completed
- the ability to choose the most apt textual examples to clarify and support a significant thesis

The student is in command of the topic, demonstrating not only enthusiasm and some originality in discussing it but a depth and breadth of knowledge as well. The essay is logically and coherently organized, convincingly argued, and clearly and elegantly expressed. It is a pleasure to read.

No essay can receive a grade of "A" unless it is *virtually free* of errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. An "A" essay also follows the MLA conventions of essay format, source citation, and scholarly documentation.

The grade of "A" is reserved for *outstandingly fine work*.

B: 79-70% = Very Good to Good

The grade of "B" indicates a *good, above-average performance*. The essay develops a clear thesis on a solid basis of knowledge; it is a competent, accurate treatment of its topic that reflects a serious and intelligent engagement with the material. The essay demonstrates the student's firm grasp of most of the skills of literary criticism (please refer to the bulleted list above). A "B" essay is well-organized and clearly expressed; every sentence is comprehensible and has a clear purpose. Essays at the bottom of this range may not have fully digested the material, or they may oversimplify a complex topic, or they may lean uncritically on secondary sources.

The “B” essay is characterized by *very few* errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, or spelling. A “B” essay also follows the MLA conventions for scholarly papers.

The grade of “B” is reserved for *good to very good work*.

C: 69-60% = Satisfactory

The grade of “C” indicates a *satisfactory performance*. The essay has a recognizable thesis, but the thesis remains undeveloped or is self-evident or, at the bottom of this range, is somewhat unclear. There is evidence of an overall plan but, typically, there is some confusion of thought and order. The essay demonstrates that the student has not yet acquired a number of the skills of literary criticism (please refer to the bulleted list above).

Much of the essay may be summary or paraphrase with only occasional analytical comment; at the bottom of this range, the essay may offer only a list of observations on the text(s) that is not put in the service of a controlling idea, or the essay may rely almost exclusively on secondary sources.

The “C” essay has sentences that are convoluted or even incomprehensible. There will be errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, or spelling. A “C” essay may also demonstrate a lack of care or knowledge concerning the MLA conventions for scholarly papers.

The grade of “C” is reserved for *work that is no more than satisfactory*.

D: 59-50% = Minimal Pass

The grade of “D” indicates a *minimally acceptable performance*. The essay demonstrates some grasp of the topic, but not much. There may be serious inaccuracies or inconsistencies, indicating that the student has not understood the text or the assignment. The student may assert opinions but does not support them with evidence or argument. Where sources are cited, they tend to be misused or misinterpreted.

The “D” essay lacks coherence, has many errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, or spelling and evinces a lack of knowledge of the MLA conventions. PLEASE NOTE: Any paper that contains a large number of stylistic, grammatical and formatting errors may receive a grade of “D.”

The grade of “D” is awarded to *minimally acceptable work*.

F: 49-0% = Unacceptable

This grade indicates a *failure*. The essay is disorganized, obscure, full of grammatical errors, and unscholarly. The paper demonstrates the student’s total lack of understanding of the material and of the purpose and form of a university essay.

THIS GRADE IS ALSO GIVEN FOR PLAGIARISM. Please refer to the Policy on Academic Dishonesty in the Nipissing University Calendar (page 287).

The grade of “F” is assigned to *unacceptable work*.