

## **Grades and Grading: Issues and Approaches**

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Friday, May 13, 2005; 8:30 – 10:00 am, Proctor Classroom 42, Knight Library

How do you grade, and why do you grade in this manner? Is it better to curve the grades or stick to a standard? Are you too tough or too easy? Is grade inflation becoming a problem in your department?

Grades and grading provoke strong feelings in both instructors and students. In this workshop, we will explore the pros and cons of giving extra credit, how to handle grade changes, whether class attendance and participation should count towards a student's grade, grade inflation, curves vs. standards. We will also provide materials outlining some of the most current research about grades and grading.

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**(Note: material taken verbatim from cited source.)**

### **University of Washington's Faculty Resource on Grading**

While some of the information is specific to UW, there is a lot of generalizable information on this site. Includes sections on: Plan to Grade, Grading Practices, Faculty Forum, Conduct, Students w/ Disabilities, and Policies & Forms.

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/>

Especially recommended is *Developing a Personal Grading Plan* by David A. Frisbie and Kristie K. Waltman, University of Iowa, *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, Fall 1992.

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/plan/frisbie1.htm>

### **Grading Practices**

Chapter from *Tools for Teaching* by Barbara Gross Davis. Excellent overview.

<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/grading.html>

### **A Method for Grading Essays in Any Course**

Written by Candace Caraco, TA, Department of English, for the *Teaching Concerns* newsletter at the University of Virginia.

[http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching\\_Concerns/Fall\\_1996/TC\\_Fall\\_1996\\_Caraco.htm](http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching_Concerns/Fall_1996/TC_Fall_1996_Caraco.htm)

### **Guidelines for Evaluation**

From the University of Northern British Columbia's nursing program, this site offers criteria for clinical practice.

<http://web.unbc.ca/~quarles/nursing/clinical/clineval.htm>

### **Improving College Grading**

Written by Gerald S. Hanna and William E. Cashin from Kansas State University, this publication offers an in depth look at issues related to grading. Downloads as a PDF file.

[http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea\\_Paper\\_19.pdf](http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea_Paper_19.pdf)

### **Fast and Equitable Grading**

A number of different tips from the Teaching Resources and Continuing Education Office at the University of Waterloo. Downloads as a PDF file.

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infotrac/tips/fastandequitablegrading.pdf>

### **Grading Papers**

A quick guide taken from a list by Lewis Hyde, edited by Sue Lonoff, with thanks to Richard Marius's writing handbook from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University.

<http://bokcenter.fas.harvard.edu/docs/GradingPapers.html>

### **Evaluation Issues—Grading**

Wide ranging discussion from the publication *Teaching at Carolina*, written and published online by the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<http://ctl.unc.edu/he2.html>

### **Grade and Go**

Ideas to help streamline grading from the Center for Teaching and Learning at Indiana State University.

[http://web.indstate.edu/ctl/tips/tip3\\_17.html](http://web.indstate.edu/ctl/tips/tip3_17.html)

### **Grading**

TEP site content.

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/faqs/grading/grading.html>

### **What is an "A" Paper?**

University Writing Center, California State University-Los Angeles. Defines an "A" paper for different disciplines.

[http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/write\\_cn/apaper.htm](http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/write_cn/apaper.htm)

### **Grading Criteria**

John Stenzel, University Writing Program, UC-Davis.

<http://wid.ucdavis.edu/handouts/standard.htm>

### **Grading Student Papers: Some Guidelines for Commenting on and Grading Students' Written Work in Any Discipline**

A joint publication of the University of Maryland's Freshman Writing Program and the Center for Teaching Excellence.

(Downloads as a PDF file)

<http://www.cte.umd.edu/teaching/grading%20handbook.pdf>

### **What is an "A" paper?**

Contributed by Louise Bishop from the UO Honors College

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/exchange/assessment/gradingrubrics/whatisapapbish.html>

### **On Grades and Grading**

<http://beloit.edu/~gummern/grading.html>

By Natalie Gummer, Assistant Professor at Beloit College

### **Getting an A on an English Paper**

By Jack Lynch from Rutgers University-Newark.

<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/EngPaper/grades.html>

### **Blog Rubric**

From the Digital Media Center at the University of Minnesota.

[http://dmc.umn.edu/kurtis/pod/blog\\_rubrics.doc](http://dmc.umn.edu/kurtis/pod/blog_rubrics.doc)

### **Communicating High Expectations to Students**

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/librarylinks/articles/highexpect.html>

### **Testing and Grading**

By Stanford C. Erinkson from Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at the University of Michigan.

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/crlttext/occ2text.html>

### **Grading**

A number of links to "Teaching Tips" articles provided by the Teaching Resource Center at the University of Virginia.

[http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching\\_Concerns/TC\\_Topic/Grading.htm](http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching_Concerns/TC_Topic/Grading.htm)

### **Grading Class Participation**

Martha L. Maznevski, Assistant Professor, McIntire School of Commerce

[http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching\\_Concerns/Spring\\_1996/TC\\_Spring\\_1996\\_Maznevski.htm](http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching_Concerns/Spring_1996/TC_Spring_1996_Maznevski.htm)

### **Writing and Grading Essay Questions**

Written and designed by the staff of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

<http://ctl.unc.edu/fyc7.html>

### **Grading Systems**

Written and designed by the staff of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

<http://ctl.unc.edu/fyc10.html>

### **Grading Templates**

From the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

<http://ctl.unc.edu/gt.html>

### **Grading Standards**

[http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing\\_Disciplines/pdfs/Rubrics.pdf](http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing_Disciplines/pdfs/Rubrics.pdf)

By Kerry Walk, Director of the Princeton Writing Program and Maxine Rodburg, Director of the Writing Center, Harvard University. (Downloads as a PDF file.)

### **Failing to Motivate**

#### **Why does a poor grade inspire one student to do better and another to do worse?**

By James M. Lang

The Chronicle of Higher Education, December 3 2004

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i15/15c00201.htm> **Princeton University Grading Policies**

Approved by the University Faculty, April 26, 2004

[http://www.princeton.edu/~odoc/grading\\_policies.htm](http://www.princeton.edu/~odoc/grading_policies.htm)

### **Explaining Princeton's New Grading Policy**

<http://www.princeton.edu/%7Eodoc/Grading%20Excerpt%20PPNsum04.pdf>

Featured article in Princeton Parents News, by Dean Nancy Weiss Malkiel. (Downloads as a PDF file.)

### **Grading Definitions (Princeton University)**

Approved by the University Faculty, April 26, 2004

<http://www.princeton.edu/~odoc/GRADING%20DEFINITIONS.htm>

### **Using Student Ratings by Ken Bain (NYU)**

Excellent discussion of how to construct and use student evaluations. Discusses relationship between grades and course evaluations.

<http://www.nyu.edu/cte/white.html>

### **Grading Blues**

#### **When you sit before a stack of ungraded exams, anything seems preferable to the task at hand**

By Abe Socher

The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 22, 2005

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i33/33c00301.htm>

### **Grading on My Nerves**

#### **A professor develops a powerful aptitude for evasion, delay, and self-protection**

By Max Clio (pseudonym)

The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 21, 2003

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i13/13c00201.htm>

### **On Your Marks**

#### **We are not alone, those of us who indulge in procrastination and get irritable when grading. We are legion.**

By Max Clio (pseudonym)

The Chronicle of Higher Education, June 25, 2004

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i42/42c00201.htm>

## What is an "A" paper?

Contributed by Louise Bishop, UO Honors College

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/exchange/assessment/gradingrubrics/whatisapapbish.html>

This question is probably the most frequently asked in any literature class. To help answer it, let me outline for you what a paper must have in order to get a "C" grade:

- The paper must be college-level work: that means that it must have evidence of thoughtful inquiry. A college-level paper does not have misspelled words (especially in the age of spell-check); a college level paper does not have grammatical errors. Such errors reduce a paper's grade to below a C; no paper with such errors can receive higher than a C-, and most will receive D's.
- The paper must have a thesis. A thesis is the paper's "point," what the paper is about, which is more particular than just being "about" Arcadia, for instance, or about modernism. What in particular are you exploring? What point are you trying to make about your specific area of inquiry? Coming up with a thesis you find intriguing, demanding, outrageous, or confusing means reading, talking with your group, talking with me, and testing your ideas with your peers. Don't be surprised if your thesis changes in the course of writing your paper; instead, count on it, and be sure to write rough drafts. If your paper doesn't have a thesis, it will receive no grade higher than a C-, and it will most likely receive a D.

So what makes a "B" paper? Besides correct spelling, good grammar, and a thesis, the "B" paper's thesis is interesting, limited, and specific. Its argument takes clear steps, and its good, cogent evidence ("judicious quotation") and organization reveal the care taken in writing the paper and analyzing the evidence. Its paragraphs make sense as paragraphs--each treats a part of the argument--and the paragraphs follow one another logically, tied together by an implicit structure (the enthymeme).

Then there's the "A" paper. Besides correct spelling, good grammar, and good evidence, and logical organization, the "A" paper has a compelling thesis, one that might challenge at first but which holds its own with the reader. There are no holes in its argument: on the contrary, its analysis is sophisticated, complete, and challenging. It's a paper the reader thinks *with*, where the next idea presented is both precise and intriguing. An "A" paper reads beautifully aloud, and reveals a probing intellect. An "A" paper has some "art" to it.

The most important advice I can give you for writing "A" papers is to write a draft a week ahead of the due date and revise it BEFORE HANDING IT IN. I've found in my own writing that I don't figure out what I'm talking about until the end of writing my first draft. Only when I've written a draft does my thesis become clear. When I rewrite, I use what I've figured out at the end of the writing process to BEGIN my second draft, and VOILA! I have a better paper. I'm happy to read rough drafts of your papers, and I encourage you to spend the minimum time needed to write a good paper (a simple rule of thumb: a five-page paper requires at least ten hours of organizing and writing, and that doesn't include research time).

## On Grades and Grading

<http://beloit.edu/~gummern/grading.html>

By Natalie Gummer, Assistant Professor at Beloit College

Unless you prove me wrong, I will assume: a) that you enrolled in this course because you are interested in what you can learn; and b) that you are prepared to take responsibility for your own very central role in the learning process. I am here to facilitate that process, not to "discipline" you or to force you to be engaged with the course. That's up to you. If you engage sincerely with the material in the course and act responsibly as a student, you will very likely do well.

I conceive of grading as a diagnostic tool — a way of helping you to see which aspects of your work are strong, and which could be improved. Grades are not rewards or punishments, and they are not judgments of you. A "low" grade on work that you attempted to do well simply indicates that you need to work on developing certain capacities and skills.

### Grading Scale

You should know that I have high expectations. Please revise **before** you submit your work (unless you are taking a course in which I accept drafts). In my experience, few assignments that have not undergone revision merit an A-range grade. The A-range is reserved for exceptional work, not simply for work that fulfills the assignment. Revising your assignments and working to improve your writing are part of your responsibility as a student. You are strongly encouraged to visit the writing center — every writer, no matter how gifted, stands to benefit from the feedback of others.

Because I tend to give lower numerical grades than many other professors, the following scale is somewhat generous. The list below explains the scale according to which I convert percentages to grades, and gives a very general explanation of the significance of the grade.

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>A: 90-100%</b>                  | Exceptional work in every respect.  |
| <b>A-: 85-89%</b>                  | Excellent work that displays minor flaws or inconsistencies.  |
| <b>B+: 80-84%</b>                  | Very good work that, with a little more thought and revision, could be excellent.                           |
| <b>B: 75-79%</b>                   | Good work that could benefit from deeper thought, more skillful execution, or a more polished presentation. |
| <b>B-: 70-75%</b>                  | Work that shows some potential, but that could be improved significantly in one or more ways.               |
| <b>C+: 67-69%</b>                  | Adequate work that displays weaknesses in concept or execution.   |
| <b>C: 64-66%</b>                   | Barely adequate work that contains serious flaws in conception or execution.                                |
| <b>C- and below: 63% and below</b> | Work that fails to fulfill the assignment and that contains major inaccuracies or weaknesses.               |

### What does an A paper look like?

Steven L. VanderStaay. Western Washington University

<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~vandesl/Eng347W03.htm>

An A paper is *profound* in that it provides an illuminating interpretation of the importance, meaning, or significance of some element in a text. Typically, A papers begin with description and analysis as the writer explains what element of the text she will focus on and analyzes textual examples of that "what" to demonstrate how they function. Ideally, the reading becomes an interpretation when the writer answers the "so what?" question of her analysis in such a way that the reader learns something, not simply about the book, but about the difference the book makes in the world. This often requires connecting the text to another source of meaning--whether it be history and culture, the writer's life, or the reader's experience. A papers are elegant as well instructive, well written and crafted as well as persuasive. Consequently, they are also rare. You do not need to write an A paper to earn an A in this course. However, it should be kept in mind that a B is a good grade.

## Getting an A on an English Paper

by Jack Lynch, Rutgers University – Newark

<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/EngPaper/grades.html>

This is a guide about getting an A. Here's what that means in my classes. (For those with other professors, your mileage may vary.)

Here are the categories I use when I assign grades:

### A

Only the best papers earn an A: they do everything that a B paper does (see below), and they go beyond that by catching my attention. A papers not only do nothing *wrong*; they're engaging and say something interesting. They're well organized and well written, not only avoiding mistakes but showing real elegance and grace. Most of all, they're daring or unexpected: they teach me something new, or show me something about a text I hadn't seen before.

### B

A B paper makes no major errors. It has a clear **thesis**; it develops it well, with plenty of insightful **close reading**; it's **well written**, and not marred by any serious **mechanical** problems.

### C

A paper will earn some kind of C if it's lacking one or more of the essential ingredients for a B. The most common problem is a **bad thesis** — that does in more papers than every other problem combined. But others have reasonable theses but are weak on **close readings**. **Style** and **mechanics** alone rarely doom a paper to C-dom, but someone with poor writing skills who can't get a point across might end up with a C for that reason.

### D

I don't give many D's. Only those with more than one *serious* problem deserve that sort of treatment. A paper with no recognizable **thesis**, with only a superficial grasp of the text, and really poor expression, for instance — that's D territory. If you're earning D's in my classes, you should certainly talk to me, and maybe to the Writing Center; it means you need to do a lot of work.

### F

Here's my bargain: I won't fail any paper that shows honest effort. That means F's are reserved for papers that show *no* effort (if it was dashed off two hours before it was due, for instance), and for those that aren't honest. **Plagiarism** will always earn you an F not only for the paper but for the course, and might even result in disciplinary action like suspension or expulsion: it's serious stuff.

It's frustrating to have to shoehorn papers into the small number of categories available to me: at Rutgers, I have to choose among A, B+, B, C+, C, D, and F. I'm therefore fond of pluses, minuses, and various combinations — A-/B+, that sort of thing — to show which way a paper is leaning. A paper that starts with a reasonable **thesis**, for instance, but that doesn't use evidence well enough to make a convincing argument, might earn a B-minus. All these niceties are lost when I submit a final grade, but I try to be as clear as possible.

As I said, these are *my* guidelines. Students are sometimes convinced that grades are assigned almost randomly: Professor A gives an A- and Professor B gives a C+ to the same paper. But in fact the variability in grading isn't what it seems. Most wide divergences in grades result from a paper that does some things very well and others very badly — Professor A might think the **close reading** is perceptive enough to make up for the weak **thesis**, while Professor B thinks the vague thesis dooms the paper to a lower grade, however insightful the readings. Or it might be use of evidence *versus* mechanical mistakes, or whatever. And sometimes it depends on what sort of class you're in: English Composition 101 might expect something different from Advanced Readings in Postmodern American Authors. But most professors will agree within, say, half a grade on a paper that's consistently good or bad.

## **Grading Criteria**

Scott Bryson, Mount St. Mary's College  
<http://www.msmc.la.edu/pages/1785.asp>

### **A paper:**

Perhaps the principal characteristic of the A paper is its rich content. The information delivered is such that the reader feels both persuaded and significantly taught by the author, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. It reflects a thorough grasp of the subject under consideration, as well as the writer's ability to read texts and evaluate ideas carefully and critically. The thesis is arguable, and its development reveals capacity and willingness to confront complex issues without over-simplifying or otherwise distorting them. Clear claims begin each paragraph, and the author provides ample supporting evidence, with textual evidence (if necessary) smoothly integrated into the author's own prose. The A paper is also marked by stylistic finesse: the title and opening paragraph are engaging, the transitions are artful, the phrasing is light, fresh, and highly specific, the sentence structure is varied, and the tone enhances the purpose of the paper. Finally, because of its careful organization and development, the A paper imparts a feeling of wholeness and unusual clarity, which is not marred by distracting mechanical errors.

### **B paper:**

The B paper is significantly more than competent. Besides being almost free of mechanical errors, the B paper delivers substantial information. Its points are logically ordered, developed, and unified around a clear, arguable, thesis that is apparent at the end of the introduction. This thesis is highly persuasive due to the specific and strong evidence provided in support of it. The opening paragraph draws the reader in; the closing paragraph is both conclusive and thematically related to the opening; and each of the body paragraphs is guided by a topic sentence that is supported by evidence. The transitions between paragraphs are for the most part smooth. The sentence structure is pleasingly varied. The diction in the B paper is typically much more concise and precise than that found in the C paper. On the whole, then, a B paper makes the reading experience a pleasurable one, for it offers substantial information with few distractions.

### **C paper:**

The C paper meets the assignment, has few mechanical errors, is reasonably well organized and developed, and is centered around a clear and well-supported thesis. The actual information it delivers, however, seems thin and commonplace. One reason for that impression is that the ideas are typically cast in the form of vague generalities. Stylistically, the C paper may have other shortcomings as well: the opening paragraph does little to draw the reader in, the final paragraph offers only a perfunctory wrap-up, the transitions between paragraphs are bumpy, the sentences seem to follow a predictable order, and/or the diction is occasionally marred by unconscious repetitions, redundancy, and imprecision. The C paper, then, gets the job done but lacks the imagination and intellectual rigor apparent in the A or B paper.

### **D paper:**

The D grade indicates the ability to follow instructions and to complete assignments at the minimal levels of effort and skill required to function passably as a college student. The D essay may reflect a limited capacity to understand and to respond to the ideas and arguments of texts; it may not present all necessary information; it may not be guided by a clear sense of purpose and direction. The thesis, although recognizable, may be superficial and/or obvious. The essay's development may be restricted by limited knowledge of the subject and related issues, by illogical or incomplete thinking, and/or by paucity of specific, substantial, or relevant support. Transitions are likely to be ineffective or non-existent. Some sentences may be awkward and confusing, some words used imprecisely and incorrectly. Grammatical, usage, punctuation, or spelling errors may distract the reader.

### **F paper:**

The F grade is assigned to work that fails to satisfy minimum standards of competence. F essays often indicate inability or unwillingness to follow instructions, to read carefully and critically, to deliver essential and sufficient information, to generate an arguable thesis, or to logically and specifically link evidence to an argument. The writing may be so deficient as to be difficult to follow; it may be marred by a highly distracting number of grammatical, usage, spelling, and punctuation errors.

**\*\*Note:** Distracting mechanical and grammatical errors may substantially lower an essay's final grade, or even prevent the essay from passing.

## **What is an "A" Paper?**

University Writing Center, California State University-Los Angeles

[http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/write\\_cn/apaper.htm](http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/write_cn/apaper.htm)

In the Spring 1995 issue of our newsletter we asked faculty to respond to the following questions: "What are the characteristics of an 'A' paper for your particular course?" and "What are typical problems that prevent a paper from getting an 'A'?" The faculty responses we received raised important issues and provided some useful insights. Evaluating writing is always a matter of weighing and balancing numerous factors, and an element of subjectivity is unavoidable. How much should cogent arguments and accurate facts count? What about organization and style? Are grammatical errors important? Should we consider effort and improvement? It is important to make clear decisions about your criteria before you begin to grade papers. Ideally, these criteria should be presented in a clearly articulated framework that you can share and discuss with your students.

## **Define the "C" Paper**

Students often assume that if they do everything that you ask them to do, even in a minimal way, they should get an "A." To prevent this misunderstanding, it is sometimes useful to start out by defining the "C" grade, the minimum standard to pass, and then define the "B" and "A" grades as involving more effort and more skill, as is done in this grading scale, that was originally designed by Alice Roy, but which has been adapted and modified by numerous other faculty. This particular version was adapted by Sharon Bassett for English 101.

In this framework the "C" paper responds to the assignment in a focused, organized way. All the basic parts of the essay are there, but it may be lacking in development or support, the style is basic, and there may be grammatical errors and some syntactic problems, as long as they don't cause confusion. The "B" paper has these same basic parts, but the introduction and conclusion are more effective, the argument is stronger and better supported, and there are fewer errors. The "A" paper is stronger in every way, but the main difference is that the writer has a voice, a style and a purpose.

## **"A" for Anthropology**

Geri-Ann Galanti in the Anthropology Department said that an "A" paper for her Anthropology 250 course has the following characteristics:

1. Follows directions and completes all aspects of the assignment,
2. Interviews more than the minimum number of people required,
3. Is well-written and well-organized, making it easy for the reader, and
4. Does an in-depth analysis of the data.

Galanti says, "If the student does the first 3 things on my list above, they will generally receive a 'B.' To get an 'A,' however, I must see evidence that they can go beyond mere description and comparison—that they can analyze data." They must be able to "explain why people respond in certain ways; how it relates to other aspects of their culture, etc." According to Galanti, "inability to do in-depth analysis is the major problem preventing papers from receiving 'A' grades."

## **Declarative and Procedural Knowledge**

In *Thinking and Writing in College* Barbara Walvoord and Lucile McCarthy note that cognitive psychologists distinguish between declarative knowledge (knowledge of what) and procedural knowledge (knowledge of how) (p. 59). In Galanti's scheme this distinction is the crucial difference between the "B" and the "A." The "B" student presents the anthropological concepts learned from the course along with the data that has been gathered. The "A" student uses anthropological concepts and procedures to analyze the data, and goes beyond reporting about anthropology to doing it.

Walvoord and McCarthy use the terms "textprocessor" and "layperson" to describe two related ways students can go wrong in writing for discipline courses. The textprocessor is a student who "focuses centrally on processing texts in some way (summarizing, reviewing, commenting) rather than on addressing the issues and solving the problems outlined in the assignment." (We might add "copying" to the above list.) The layperson addresses "the issues and problems, but does not use the knowledge and methodology being taught in the course."

Neither type of student is likely to get an "A." The "A" student is likely to take on the "professional-in-training" role, focusing on the issues or problems outlined in the assignment, and "using, not ignoring," the knowledge and methodology of the course (9). This is the key point in Galanti's distinction.

### **An "A" in Sociology**

Cristina Bodinger-deUriarte, in the Sociology Department, sent us a useful ten-point checklist that defines an "A" paper very specifically. Point five asks the writer to make his or her own "value added" contribution clear. This is a good way to help students understand the basic difference between the textprocessor and the professional-in-training role.

Bodinger-deUriarte requires a conclusion that focuses on the "so what" factor--the significance of the issues. While some formats might place this information in the introduction, it is clear that the "A" paper recognizes a significance beyond the classroom and the grade.

### **An Element of Pretense**

Most classroom assignments involve an element of pretense, because while the instructor is the real audience, he or she does not read the papers to be informed or persuaded by them. The "A" paper, however, transcends this pretense, and begins to function as a real world document would.

However, as Bodinger-Uriarte's checklist makes clear, assignments have purposes, and the writer of the "A" paper must keep the assignment in mind and remain obedient to its constraints.

### **An "A" Paper in Chemistry**

In some disciplines, the formal constraints of the writing assignments are very strict indeed. In the sciences, it is imperative that the paper have the proper sections, and that the proper information and appropriate style appear in each section.

Donald R. Paulson, in *Chemistry and Biochemistry*, wrote, "An 'A' paper will include an introduction that clearly provides background material and focuses on the scope of the review. The review section must contain three to four paragraphs focusing on different aspects of the subject being reviewed. Each paragraph in the review section must have a topic sentence which clearly states the area being reviewed in that paragraph. Every sentence in that paragraph must relate to the topic sentence."

"The discussion section must discuss only material that is included in the review section. Each paragraph of the discussion must focus on some specific set of data presented in the review." As in the review section, topic sentences and appropriate transitions are required.

### **A Minimum of Errors**

Finally, "An 'A' paper will also have a minimum number of spelling or grammatical errors. In addition, the paper should be written in a style that does not include either very long sentences with superfluous words or very short sentences. In other words, clarity and conciseness are very important. Finally, the citation and reference styles must be those recommended by the American Chemical Society's Style Manual."

Even this short discussion reveals that there are great differences between disciplines in terms of expectations and standards. The Writing Center welcomes further input from faculty on this important issue.

## Comments by students in an ALS 199 “Study with Focus” class about “What is an ‘A’ Paper?”—Spring, 2005

An “A” paper, despite what some of the teachers I have had may think, is NOT a piece of work that they themselves may have written. This would be an A++ paper. An A paper should be the cream of the crop among other papers you receive, because most papers reflect on the teacher’s ability to teach, so use your teaching as a basis.

- Thoughtful
- Understanding of a different perspective
- Well thought out
- Fluent
- Good points
- Interesting
- Intellectual
- Noticeable devised plan
- Good grammar

An “A” paper is easy to read. It covers all aspects of the information discussed. The reader has to be left with no further questions about what the paper was about.

- A paper that follows the given guidelines.
- One that isn’t half-assed; but also doesn’t run off on different tangents and ramble.
- Meets the requirements.

A+ papers are anything which touches my fingers!

- Has all the relevant info
- Makes sense
- Flows material-wise
- No spelling errors
- Answers the essay question/fulfills the assignment
- Personal ideas/stories
- Not too many quotes
- Doesn’t have to be 100% grammatically correct, but well-written

An “A” paper for me is one that is written from a personal point of view that let’s the prof get to know his/her students. If an author can relate personal life experiences to the research they are doing.

- One that follows the instructor or assignment
- Proper grammar/spelling/etc.
- Shows insight into subject

Clear, concise, entertaining, shows a mastery of the subject. NOT who has the best grammar or the perfect bibliography or writes exactly 6 pgs not 5 or 7.

- An A paper is fluid and keeps the reader engaged.
- It must have minimal conventional errors.
- It also needs to have elevated vocabulary.

An A paper is when all requirements are met. When someone shares their story and works really hard. It’s when grammar mistakes are at a minimum.

- Everything I’ve turned in.
- Free of spelling errors.
- Meets all the requirements.
- Something that makes it memorable.

An “A” paper is one that meets all the requirements not necessarily exceeds them. Some teachers assign a five page paper but it has to be 6+ pages to earn an “a” on it. The paper must also show a good knowledge of what is being talked about and expressed in a coherent manner.

Well organized paper that meets the requirements. Also, it has to be easy to understand. It should have an intro and a summary. And finally, it should have examples to make points easy to understand.

An “A” paper is actual effort, and that effort (is) reflected through the writing. Vocabulary is part of an “A” paper because usually when I reread my paper 3-4 times before I turn it in I change more simple worked sentences into shorter, more to the point sentences.

## UO Grading Policy (Taken from the Faculty Handbook)

<http://academicaffairs.uoregon.edu/handbook/Chapter07.html#K>

### K. Grading

Final grades for fall and spring terms are due in the Registrar's Office not later than noon on the Tuesday following final examination week; final grades for winter term are due no later than noon on the Monday following final examination week. Faculty members report grades on final grade rosters provided by the Registrar's Office. It is important that grades be turned in as soon as possible and prior to the deadline to permit complete compilation, evaluation, and reporting of grades before the start of the next term. Faculty members must report late grades and any grade changes on an individual supplementary grade report form. The registrar will send a verification copy to the reporting department after grade changes have been recorded.

Many departments have policies governing grading, and new faculty members are expected to comply with these policies. It is a good idea for department heads to consult the registrar when the department is considering a change in grading policy or when problems with existing policy arise.

Students can access grade information as well as degree progress reports through Duck Web, an interactive application on the World Wide Web that allows students access to the UO's Student Information System.

**The Grading System** The university has two grading systems. When regulations permit, a student may elect to be evaluated for an individual class either for a letter grade or pass/no pass (P/N). Letter-graded work is designated A, B, C, D, or F. Pass/no pass work is designated P or N. An asterisk after the P or N indicates that the course is offered P/N only.

- A Excellent performance
- B Good performance
- C Satisfactory performance
- D Inferior performance
- F Unsatisfactory performance  
(no credit awarded)

Instructors may affix plus and minus marks to the grades A, B, C, and D.

A student may choose to exercise the pass/no pass option in any class at the time of registration, as designated in the Schedule of Classes. When assigning the pass/no pass option, an undergraduate student may receive a "P" (pass) for satisfactory work at the C- level or above or an "N" (no pass) for less-than-satisfactory work at the D+ level or below. Graduate students must achieve a B- or better to earn a "pass."

It is up to the major department to decide whether or the extent to which credit earned with a mark of P is acceptable toward the satisfaction of major requirements.

In addition, the system affords the following special marks:

- I Incomplete
- W Withdrawn
- X No grade or incorrect grading option reported by instructor
- Y No basis for grade
- AUD Audit

**Grade Point Average** The grade point average (GPA) is computed only for work done at the University of Oregon. Four points are assigned for each credit of A, three points for each credit of B, two points for each credit of C, one point for each credit of D, and zero points for each credit of F.

The plus sign increases the points assigned the letter grade by 0.30 per credit, and the minus sign decreases the points assigned the letter grade by 0.30 per credit. Marks of AUD, I, W, X, Y, and the grades of P and N are disregarded in the computation of the grade point average. The grade point average is calculated by dividing total points by total credits of A, B, C, D, and F.

**Grading Guidelines (Lundquist College of Business)**  
[http://lcb.uoregon.edu/undergrad/grading\\_guidelines.html](http://lcb.uoregon.edu/undergrad/grading_guidelines.html)

The Executive Council (deans & department chairs) has developed grading guidelines to:

- Provide grading guidance to instructors,
- Increase grading consistency across courses, and
- Give students clear information on academic standards in the Lundquist College.

**Philosophy**

One of the most important roles students and society expect of teachers and educational institutions is the evaluation of student learning and achievement. Instructors in higher education must distinguish passing from failing and excellence from mediocrity. Failure to make these useful and important distinctions reduces the value of education to students and to society.

**Implementation**

The table below lists the guidelines developed by the Executive Council. While there is variation across classes in the ability and effort of students, the standards are sufficiently broad to accommodate reasonable variation in performance.

The GPAs listed below are Class GPAs computed by multiplying the number of A, A-, B+, C, etc. grades times the GPA value of each grade. For example consider a class with 40 students with the following grades: 8 A, 14 B, 16 C, and 2 D. The calculation is  $[(8 \times 4.0) + (14 \times 3.0) + (16 \times 2.0) + (2 \times 1.0)]/40 = (32 + 42 + 32 + 2)/40 = 2.70$  GPA. Thus, a class GPA of 2.70 can result from many different distributions of grades, i.e., all B's and C's, A's, B's C's and D's etc. There is no quota on the number of A's or B's. Grade distributions in the vast majority of Lundquist College classes last year fit within the grade point ranges listed below.

**Average Grade Point Ranges by Type of Classes**

| <b>Class Level</b>                 | <b>Average Grade Point Range</b> |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Undergraduate Pre-Business Classes | 2.3 - 2.8                        |
| Undergraduate Minor Classes        | 2.7 - 3.2                        |
| Undergraduate Major Core Classes   | 2.6 - 3.1                        |
| Undergraduate Major Electives      | 2.7 - 3.2                        |
| Undergraduate Honors Classes       | 3.2 - 3.5                        |
| MBA Core Classes                   | 3.1 - 3.4                        |
| Other Masters Classes              | 3.2 - 3.5                        |

**Grading Definitions (Princeton University)**

Approved by the University Faculty, April 26, 2004

<http://www.princeton.edu/~odoc/GRADING%20DEFINITIONS.htm>

- A+ Exceptional; significantly exceeds the highest expectations for undergraduate work.
- A Outstanding; meets the highest standards for the assignment or course.
- A- Excellent; meets very high standards for the assignment or course.
- B+ Very good; meets high standards for the assignment or course.
- B Good; meets most of the standards for the assignment or course.
- B- More than adequate; shows some reasonable command of the material.
- C+ Acceptable; meets basic standards for the assignment or course.
- C Acceptable; meets some of the basic standards for the assignment or course.
- C- Acceptable, while falling short of meeting basic standards in several ways.
- D Minimally acceptable; lowest passing grade.
- F Failing; very poor performance.

## Comments by students in an ALS 199 “Study with Focus” class about Grades & Grading—Spring, 2005

- Give the students the benefit of the doubt if they are not trustworthy it is themselves they hurt.
- Give an opportunity for extra credit—life happens and even good students have off days.
- Make sure your GTF grades the same way you would.
- If possible put weight in improvement not memorization.
- Big picture and application is more useful than memorization.
- Trick questions uncool.
- Mix up essay and multiple choice.
- Even in multiple choice questions give tests back so students know what they missed and can find out why.
- Grades add a lot of stress!
- Many times profs will put so much weight on grades that it's hard to take an actual interest in the material instead of focusing on making the grade.
- Curving is good to help out the grade, but depending on a curve doesn't motivate the understanding of the material.
- Don't be afraid to give “A's”. it doesn't mean that the class is too easy, just that it's straight forward and taught well.
- I would like a clear and understandable grading scale. Sometimes I find it difficult to understand the point value systems that my professors use.
- Grades are a very important aspect of the class. I would like to get a progress report to show where I stand in the class.
- If a student shows up all the time to class, does his homework, writes all papers, takes all exams, he should get grades whether he is doing well in exams or not.
- Tests shouldn't be so heavily weighed into grades. For students that do not do well on tests naturally, they are penalized (even though they do all the assignments and make an honest effort).
- Curve grades. If the majority of students did not do well, that shows that most did not understand what was being taught.
- Let the student keep track of his/her grade on-line. That way they see their progress and can make adjustments.
- When you grade, I think faculty should grade on a curve, if this is absolutely NOT possible they should grade fairly, write down why the student deserves the grade and find a way for the student to give extra credit. The goal is that the students learn in the end not how swift you are with a red pen. Also if the whole class receives a bad grade consider revising your test.
- When grading it helps to write how to do the correct answer. Specifically in math classes. Or post solutions online. Be descriptive in what's wrong/good or what needs fixing. On writing assignments, don't just underline stuff.
- Also in terms of grades, count all B-'s as B's, but do have B+'s and such.
- Adjust grading to amount and difficulty of the work.
- Effort and evidence of preparing for class should be taken into consideration for end grade.
- Be open to grading disputes and please do not quickly dismiss student concerns. Rationally negotiate.
- Grades should be curved.
- Study sheets should be available for lectures where all you do is assign readings/lecture on them.
- or
- Have a PowerPoint presentation with key points after you talk or before so it is easier to understand the information.
- The best, most influential teacher I ever had in high school hated grades. He only wrote comments on our papers, no grades. He held a PhD from here at the U of O. Show up, do the reading, try hard, get engaged, and do every assignment. If we did all this we would receive a good grade.
- The best teacher I have had at the U of O was the exact same way. I took his class (400 level) as an elective at 8:00 a.m. two days a week, because a friend told me he was a great teacher.
- Making the grades available to see and updated.
- I like when the grades are curved. It gives me a security blanket.
- Professors that are flexible.
- If you get good grades all year, you don't have to take the final.
- Writing and going by percentages.
- Not going on the point system!!!
- Letter grades.
- If you improve at the end, then they pass you.
- C's are no longer acceptable as an average. Average students don't get scholarships or entry into grad-schools. Average students receive less opportunities for education. It's like work experience. How can you get any if you have none?