

Rationale for distinguishing among grades

“A” grades: Students earning an “A” on writing assignments (10/10 or 9/10) have exemplified a high level of aptitude and accomplishment by transforming a complex idea into a concise yet comprehensive analysis. They support their proposition with thoughtfully chosen references and original examples. They use the relevant vocabulary and refined sentence structures. Each paragraph of their essay elegantly builds upon previous ones. Papers in this range tend to display a formidable amount of sophistication in an economy of space.

“B” grades: A grade of 8/10 exemplifies a high level of competency. Theoretical ideas are explained with clarity and the language used to convey ideas is unambiguous so that the reader has few if any difficulties understanding the overall ideas or intentions. There are three common factors for not reaching a 9/10: (1) not explaining a concept clearly and precisely, (2) not applying the most relevant example(s) in support of the main argument, and (3) not demonstrating convincingly a true comprehension of the reading (or other references) due to an over-reliance on direct quotation from and trivial rewording of the references. Another reason for receiving an 8 instead of “A” grades is the accumulation of small mistakes.

“C” grades: A grade of 7/10 indicates that the student has mastered the main idea for the most part, but there are gaps in comprehension or errors in the presented arguments. There may be a failure to articulate the main idea correctly and there may be insufficient supporting evidence or examples. A student earning a “C” grade should review the grading comments and the reading carefully in order to improve their understanding and correct any errors. In some cases an improvement in writing is necessary.

“D” grades: Grades of 6/10 or 5/10 indicate a marginal comprehension of the reading, insufficient or missing answers and arguments, and a weakness in writing ability. There may be significant errors or contradictory statements in the main argument, and/or the reader is unable to deduce the student’s main argument due to the quality of the writing. In addition to reviewing the reading, students earning “D” grades are strongly encouraged to seek help from the course staff on the contents and from the writing “clinics” offered by the Summer College. Students should not be discouraged by a low grade; it is an impetus to get students to recognize problems and seek help. Improving one’s reading and writing to reach “college level” is definitely a worthwhile investment.

Grades below “D” are not discussed since none of the students in the class are capable of achieving such dreadful scores. Moreover, such low scores are usually indicative of NOT reading and NOT devoting much time to the writing.