

Grading Guidelines for Essays

The rubric below names and describes some key traits of academic texts. In practice, the five traits are interrelated; still, compared to traditional grades, this sorting by traits can offer a more calibrated measure of strengths and weaknesses. Please note that if an essay receives a 0.0 in any of the 5 categories, it cannot pass.

	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0
Purpose, Relevance & Focus	The text grapples with an issue ripe for analysis or debate and responds with insight. The writer clearly understands the assignment, demonstrates a sure grasp of the readings and contextual issues in play, and makes a perceptive contribution to the intellectual conversation on the matter. Exceptional essays reveal a creative and critical mind at work; they move readers from the <i>known</i> to the <i>new</i> ; they often take risks.	The text voices a thoughtful response to the assignment, going beyond standard expectations. The writer motivates readers to care about the issues at hand and asserts a focused, relevant, and convincing claim.	The text responds competently to the assignment, making a viable claim. The writer has something at stake and shows some promising analytical, interpretive, and rhetorical sensibilities.	The text responds adequately to the assignment and advances a reasonable but unambitious claim. The thesis may be limited, muddled or scattered, but the purpose and relevance of the piece are still discernable.	The text may be inappropriate to the assignment, reveal scant understanding of readings and contextual issues, or seem adrift. The central claim may be too obvious or too odd to motivate the intended audience to care about it.
Development	The writer marshals complete and compelling evidence to support claims and amplify key points. The text uses primary texts, reliable secondary sources, relevant data, and telling details as appropriate to the nature and scope of the assignment. The writer creates common ground with the audience and anticipates alternate perspectives and counter-arguments.	The writer selects and deploys evidence convincingly. The supporting details deepen the argument or narrative, drawing in readers. The text builds momentum; readers nod in affirmation as they move through the essay.	The writer includes enough evidence to make a competent case. The text moves reasonably well between generalities and particulars. When required, sources cited are reliable and appropriate.	The quality and quantity of support is adequate, but at times runs thin. The essay needs more flesh on the bones. Some evidence may be incomplete, stretched or suspect.	The text may be either too skimpy or too bloated. Evidence may be missing, incomplete, inappropriate or unreliable. Claims and supporting material may be mis-matched.
Arrangement	The arrangement complements the purpose and development of the piece. The writer shepherds readers through the text by making the organization evident, delivering information as needed, and clearly signaling sources, turns and transitions. The writer employs structural conventions appropriate to the assigned genre but innovates as needed.	The arrangement is thoughtful and logical. The writer respects conventions appropriate to the genre and supplies helpful cues for navigating the text (intro, forecasting, transitions, signal phrases for sources, etc.). Readers never feel lost.	The structure fits the assignment and purpose reasonably well. The arrangement is typical for the genre but doesn't go out of its way to help readers.	Structure is discernible but only marginally effective. The reader's needs are not taken into consideration. The line of development may wander too much; readers may feel temporarily lost or confused.	The organization is haphazard, showing a disregard for logic or convention. The arrangement reveals scant consideration for the needs of readers.
Style	The prose strikes readers as effective and eloquent. Sentence structures are complex and varied; the rhythm is paced; transitions are fluid; the sounds resonate. The writer adopts an audience-appropriate stance while projecting a distinctive voice.	The prose is controlled and economical, featuring purposeful transitions and some vibrant passages. The writer shows versatility.	The prose is generally controlled. Sentences and paragraphs cohere; the transitions are serviceable; the diction is audience appropriate.	The prose is readable but may be flat, repetitive, choppy, wordy, or bureaucratic. Some passages may strike the audience as irksome.	The style alienates the writer from the audience. Sentences may be so tangled that they obscure understanding.
Editing & Conventions	The writer seamlessly employs effective strategies for grammar, syntax, usage, word choice, and attribution of sources. The editing is calibrated to the intended audience and complements the purpose, meaning and style of the text.	Surface features and conventions meet audience expectations. Text is edited fairly cleanly but may include a few minor lapses, typos, awkward patches, or inconsistencies.	Text is reasonably well edited but features some distracting errors (odd phrasing, flawed punctuation, faulty parallelism, dangling modifiers, etc.).	Text is readable but reveals a few serious problems (fragments, run-ons, lack of subject-verb agreement, etc.) or frequent minor errors. Non-standard source documentation may prevail.	More than 3 or 4 serious problems--or a constellation of minor errors--emerge on each page. Surface problems impede comprehension or frustrate readers. Source attribution may be missing or seriously flawed.