Before you submit your essay
Prof. Paul R. Petrie—Southern Connecticut State University

Use both sections of this document as you prepare your work for submission.

Grading guide

This page is a general explanation of standards and expectations for formal writing in this course. It represents a "real world" standard of successful communication in writing. Use this guide to help you focus your efforts as you draft and revise your essays. When you receive an essay back from me, use this guide along with the written and oral commentary to understand what your letter grade means in terms of the particular qualities of your paper, and where to concentrate your efforts at improvement. There may, of course, be other factors (e.g. lateness, lack of adherence to the assignment, etc.) that also affect the grade your paper earns. There is no substitute for consulting with the instructor before, during, and/or after your writing process.

University Grading Standards.

Here's how the university catalog defines the meanings of letter grades at SCSU: A = exceptional; B = superior; C+/C  = average; C- and lower = passing. In addition, English majors must earn a C or better in any course to be counted toward the major.

University W-Course Standards.

All writing for this course will be measured against these standards, which have been established by the Southern Writing Program.

- Clarity of Focus: the writer's central assertion (thesis) and/or purpose is limited and clear.
- Content: the thesis (central assertion) is developed with good supporting details.
- Diction, Idiom, Level of Usage: the writer chooses words and idioms that are appropriate to the topic and audience.
- Audience Awareness and Writer Awareness: the writer establishes his or her own identity and authority and is sensitive to possible questions and objections from his or her reader.
- Organization and Style: the ideas are developed in a logical, sequential order; paragraphs are fully developed and unified, with smooth transitions between paragraphs; sentences are reasonably varied.
- Mechanics: the writer exhibits a good command of standard English grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
Instructor's Grading Standards.

More specifically, here's what I will be looking for as I read your essays and other coursework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>An A+ essay is an exceptional, unusual, excellent essay, one that not only uses the conventions of the academic essay and of standard English successfully to make a convincing argument for its thesis but also demonstrates a genuine originality of thought, clarity of perception, and individual voice. All parts of an A+ essay, with negligible exception, contribute meaningfully to the essay's purposes, and at no point is the reader left guessing or wondering what the purpose of any given element or part of the essay is, in relation to the essay's thesis. <strong>A and A- essays</strong> exhibit predominantly the qualities of an A+ essay but include occasional lapses from that standard or relatively minor deficiencies under one or more of the University W-Course Standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td>B-range essays are good, not mediocre, under most of the standards for an A essay. A B essay shows some individual clarity of interpretation, has something interesting to say about its topic, and employs a clearly recognizable thesis and a logically sequenced argument to communicate its thinking. It may show a little less accomplishment or sophistication than an A essay across all or most of the University W-Course Standards, or it may be an A essay under many of those standards but fall significantly short under one or two categories.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td>A C+ essay is an &quot;average,&quot; competently written paper. This is the level of writing I expect to be reading when I first pick up your paper, and it is the expected grade for most students. A C+ paper is acceptable but not distinguished. It begins to communicate some recognizable idea and demonstrates some familiarity with its topic, but it doesn't surprise, doesn't invite the reader to more than passing thought. It proposes to argue something that is obvious or is vaguely defined. It doesn't consider opposing evidence, doesn't make subtle distinctions, doesn't anticipate its readers' likely responses or objections, is predictable and safe. It might also be a paper that includes passages or sections of better thinking that don't cohere into a single, unified argument for the central assertion of the essay as a whole. <strong>C and C- papers usually have some of the content qualities of a C+ paper but with less frequency and/or with more problems under categories C-F of the University W-Course Standards (see above).</strong></td>
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<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>Near-failure to communicate. The paper exists, but it approaches incoherence and incomprehensibility, is seriously incomplete; and/or is couched in language that fails to communicate its subject and controlling ideas. It could consist of understandable sentences that do not connect or make up a whole.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>Failure. Unacceptable work. The paper did something unrelated to the assignment, failed to meet minimum standards for any college-level essay, and/or was an obvious attempt to hand in something—anything—without doing the necessary work involved. In the case of a plagiarized paper, an F is the mildest penalty such a paper can receive. (See the course Plagiarism Policy.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>0 (zero)</strong></td>
<td>The essay was not handed in or was plagiarized, in whole or in part.</td>
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ESSAY PROTOCOLS

Use this page as a checklist before submitting your writing in this course.*

- Follow MLA formatting rules for title page (there shouldn’t be one), headings, page numbering, line spacing, margins, fonts, long and short quotations, source citations.

- Give your paper a title that is interesting and indicative of your thesis. Do not italicize or underline it.

- Italicize or underline the titles of longer works; enclose the titles of shorter works in quotation marks.

- Identify early in the essay the full name of the author and text about which you are writing. Thereafter, refer to the author by last name only—not by first name.

- Use the proper name of an author or character, rather than a pronoun, the first time you refer to him or her in a new paragraph.

- If you quote, discuss—never assume a quotation speaks for itself.

- When you quote, contextualize: give readers a quick notion of what the situation is at the moment in the text (novel, short story, play) from which your quotation has been selected.

- Cite quotations from fiction by page number; cite quotations from poetry or drama by line number. (See MLA Handbook for details.)

- Use a direct quotation only when the specific language of the quoted text helps you make your point; if your point can be made just as easily by summarizing or describing the text you were thinking of quoting, then don’t use the quotation.

- Discuss the content of quotations directly, without making reference to the fact that you’re writing about a quotation. In other words, don’t begin your discussion of quoted material with words like "This quote is saying that . . ." or their equivalent. Instead, make a direct assertion of the interpretive significance of the quotation to your argument.

- Integrate quotations into your own sentences—they should read seamlessly. Ask yourself whether the sentence would be grammatically correct if the quotation marks were removed and all the words in the sentence were your own.

- Address an interested, educated, general audience—not limited to me or the members of this class, but someone who has read the work you’re discussing.

- Use “who” for people, reserving “that” for things. For example, “Members of Congress who voted for the bill . . .” ; not, “Members of Congress that voted for the bill . . .”

* This document was developed from a similar one by Prof. Nicole Fluhr, with her permission.
- Substitute specifics for vague, general terms. Avoid phrases like, “The two novels have many similarities and differences” or “I will examine this idea from many different perspectives” or “Many different interpretations of this text are possible.” What similarity or difference or perspective or interpretation will YOU be examining in your essay—get specific, and stay that way!

- Avoid sweeping generalizations—for instance, about what “nineteenth-century women” were like—always qualify your claims and make them specific.

- Avoid contractions (don’t, can’t) in formal writing—use complete words (do not, cannot) instead.

- Review the assignment sheet, plagiarism policy, and other relevant course documents well before handing in your paper, to make sure that your work adheres to ALL assignment expectations and course policies and to give yourself time to make needed changes.

- Staple or paper-clip the pages of the paper together. Do not use binders or plastic sleeves or folders unless instructed specifically to do so.