

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN “A” PAPER

1. Interesting Thesis

- Clearly stated as an assertion in one sentence
- Opinionated (the produce of thought and judgment)
- Makes connections or distinctions beyond the obvious and superficial. – it’s not immediately apparent to the casual reader
- Provides a purpose for the paper: a reason to write and read it

2. Useful Organization

- Provides a method or plan for proving the thesis
- Serves the interests of the paper as expressed in the thesis
- Should be a set of related ideas rather than a list of examples
- Should be generalizations relating to the main idea of the thesis

3. Rich Detail

- Specific and concrete to add weight and authority to your argument
- Relevant to the thesis’s purpose
- Organized logically within each part
- Colorful sensory detail and examples
- Expressed as part of a critical comment, rather than simply thrown in to the essay

4. Helpful Paragraphing

- Each paragraph supports one major idea
- Key idea is placed at the beginning of the paragraph
- Bulk of each paragraph should be illustration, detail, examples, or a logical progression of ideas
- Introductory paragraph engages the reader’s interest and narrows to the thesis
- Concluding paragraph synthesizes (pulls together) argument and takes it one step further

5. Polished Mechanics

- Effective wording, sentences smoothly connecting, logically constructed using coordination and subordination to emphasize the most important ideas in the sentence
- Spelling and punctuation standard and “invisible”

WHAT GRADES MEAN

“A” work is work that is exceptional. “A” work looks both at details and at the larger context, and it synthesizes material to come up with something that is new and original. “A” work has a goal, reaches it, and comes up with something new. “A” work is organized, accurate, and free of mechanical errors.

“B” work is work that is good. “B” work is on the right track to “A” work, but it isn’t as fully articulated and well thought out as “A” work. Too many signs of carelessness (i.e., mechanical errors, inaccurate citation, etc.) may return an “A” paper into a “B” paper.

“C” work is average work. It communicates what has been said in class and makes correct points, but it doesn’t take things any farther. It uses standard structures to say unoriginal things. Or it may say original things, but in such a way to make the reader confused about how the point is being made, or what it is. (Excessive mechanical errors can make a “B” paper a “C” paper because the reader has to spend so much time figuring out what is being said.)

“D” work is substandard. It misses the point, uses inaccurate information and logic, and shows a lack of thorough thought. “D” work misspells and mis-attributes names and qualities, and shows little awareness of organization and logic.

“F” work is work that does not address the problems set forward, does not have a goal, is riddled with errors, and does not communicate anything. Or it is work that has been plagiarized.

One final comment about grading. I do not “give” grades – you earn them. Although I would love to give every one of you “A”s in everything, I cannot do so unless you do work that warrants and “A.” So it is up to you.