

## ***A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO GRADES IN COMPOSITION COURSES***

The overall goal for any section of any course in Composition is to have students produce work that meets certain general standards. Each essay and research paper must:

- \* -- have a clearly stated thesis
- \* -- have sufficient and varied support drawn from more than mere personal observation
- \* -- remain focused throughout
- \* -- be mechanically proficient
- \* -- come to a logical conclusion based on the thesis presented.

However, a paper can meet all the above criteria *with varying degrees of success*, as can a body of work for a full semester.

To help students understand the rationale for grades assigned to individual papers and to the complete body of coursework for the semester, the Writing Program has developed the following criteria:

### **A (4.0 – Outstanding )**

For an individual paper to be worthy of an “A,” the classification of “outstanding” must be met consistently. Does the essay meet an ideal standard of sophisticated thinking, elegance of style, and technical proficiency? Is there real depth to the argument? Is there a certain fluidity of style that makes for effortless reading? Does it truly engage the reader with polished rhetoric? Is it basically error-free in mechanics and in logic?

If the answer to these questions is yes, the paper deserves an “A.” If the paper is lacking in some respect or is not as polished as it could be, it is not “Outstanding” and therefore not “A” material.

To achieve a solid “A” for the course, the student’s work in all aspects (in-class, first drafts, revisions, research, discussion) would have to be consistently superior. Students striving for an “A” need to think deeply about their topics and to read a variety of writing styles to enhance their own. Superficial thinking and merely competent writing have no place in this classification.

### **A minus (A- ... 3.7 – Excellent )**

A paper in this range exhibits great skill, clear and creative thinking, good style, and technical proficiency. However, it differs from a solid “A” in that there is yet some work to be done, be it in development or technical points or even clarification of facts. Arguments presented are supported with credible professional resources, such as academic journals and definitive texts in a field of study. An “A-“ paper is well-crafted but generally is less sophisticated than an essay that rates a solid “A”.

To achieve an “A minus” for the course, the student’s work in all aspects must be fairly polished, showcasing some measure of sophisticated thought and approach.

**NOTE:** Since students in the “A/A-“ range are adept at self-editing for mechanics, the writing goal centers on developing greater sophistication of style, support, and defense.

### **B+ ( 3.3 ... Very Good )**

A paper that gets a “B+” shows evidence of solid competence in mechanics and argument while featuring a unique voice and obvious style. This level paper showcases a distinct writing personality, albeit one that still requires considerable polish.

Achieving a “B+” for the course indicates that the effort all semester shows growth in development of style and greater understanding and application of more advanced support. This body of work is very readable and demonstrates clear, fine thinking on the part of the student who has an emerging awareness of his/her own style and is skilled at self-editing with a moderate amount of guidance from the instructor.

### **B ( 3.0 ... Good )**

A “B” paper is consistently clear and well-organized, has sufficient detailed support, utilizes a somewhat elevated vocabulary, presents a logical argument while neatly avoiding logical fallacies, and offers an appropriate conclusion based on the thesis originally presented.

Papers at this level demonstrate what most writing instructors would consider “college level writing”. The reasoning for defense does not fall into specious patterns, and sentence structure is varied enough to display the beginnings of individual style. Mechanics may need some editing to adjust for smoothness of flow but are generally proficient.

To achieve a solid “B” for the course, the body of work for the semester must demonstrate a consistent level of proficiency in argument, style, support, and mechanics, and, most importantly, be free of convoluted thought and structure. It must, above all, remain *readable*.

### **B minus ( B- ... 2.7 Above Average )**

A “B-“ paper demonstrates college level skill in all areas but is not as precisely presented as a solid “B” or “B+”. The arguments presented are usually not as fully developed as they need to be and the mechanics and syntax are less than precise. A paper of this grade designation generally presents good ideas but may not support or develop them fully and may not make clear connections between ideas meant to bolster the thesis.

Having a “B-“ as the final grade reflects a body of work that demonstrates a dedicated effort to the process of writing and research. The overall tone of the work is competent and clear, the papers possessing good, workmanlike quality throughout the semester.

**NOTE:** *Anything in the “B” range is evidence of very solid writing, demonstrating skill in organization and development, decent command of mechanics, presentation of a clear thesis, a solid through line, plus a logical conclusion.*

### **C+ ( 2.3 ... Average: Satisfactory)**

A “C+” paper displays a clear understanding of basic essay structure ( i.e., solid thesis, multiple paragraphs of support, clear transitions, logical conclusion, reasonably competent mechanics). It must also show some evidence of independent thinking and creative expression, at least in a rudimentary form.

Achieving a “C+” as a final course grade indicates a semester’s worth of work that demonstrates basic skill in grammatical structure and development of ideas, all rendered in the beginnings of a distinctive personal voice.

### **C ( 2.0 ... Satisfactory )**

A paper graded as “C” meets the basic requirements for an essay in that it has a thesis, a logical conclusion, some appropriate support, and a reasonable command of mechanics. It does not, however, have much else. Such a paper will address an argument in a very limited fashion, and while being clear, will not be insightful or thought-provoking. The overall presentation may be marred by repetition of ideas and limited variety in types of sentence structure used. The vocabulary level is also somewhat basic and uninspired.

A “C” earned as a final course grade signifies a body of work that never moved beyond basic presentation skills. Often, little difference in skill and style development can be noted between a first day writing sample and a final exam. While a student in this classification may have met all course requirements in terms of assignments, revisions, and participation, the actual skill level has remained about the same – competent in a very basic way but showing no evidence of any real growth.

### **C- (1.7 ... Less Than Satisfactory)**

A paper graded as “C-“ can be similar overall to a standard “C” paper in that it features all the basic component parts of an essay but there may be error patterns in mechanics that dominate the presentation and thus affect the clarity of the writing. The defense is not well-planned or developed much beyond the initial thesis statement. The few examples that are offered as support are generally drawn from personal experience or superficial assumptions based on shallow reasoning. Mechanically, the paper may be riddled with error patterns.

A final course grade of “C-“ signifies that while the student was able to present the bare bones of an argument in each paper, sufficient command of mechanics was not achieved, nor were solid proofreading skills developed and applied throughout the semester, marking the body of work as unpolished and rudimentary.

**NOTE:** *Anything in the “C” range can best be compared to high school level writing and generally falls into one of two categories: mechanically clear OR somewhat creatively rendered. While good points of style and precision can be noted at times, the writing overall lacks depth.*

### **D+ ( 1.3 ... Poor but Passing )**

A paper deserving a “D+” is easily recognized by its failure to meet very basic standards for a college essay. It is either too short, saying very little and so cannot qualify as a true defense of a point of view, or it is too long and rambling and loses focus. Mechanical problems are also evident in abundance, featuring not just a few stray typos or small mistakes, but multiple *error patterns* in mechanics, syntax, and idiom in general. Often the argument is superficial or repetitive, with the logic being full of fallacies of all types. The paper may also lack a clear thesis or fail to come to any solid conclusion. While there may be some evidence of a particular point of view, it is so weakly presented that the paper is ineffectual.

A final course grade of “D+” signifies that the student applied few, if any, of the techniques presented in the course to his/her own writing. There has been very little improvement or attempt at same. Often, the record will show that a student receiving such a grade is missing assignments and/or attended class irregularly.

### **D ( 1.0 ... Minimum for Passing )**

A paper receiving a “D” is one that displays minimal development and minimal understanding of the mechanics of written English. It may be incomprehensible and is certainly empty of original ideas. It often reads as a “token” submission in that the writer jotted down something in a hurry just to meet the requirement for submission. “No real thought, no real effort” is the hallmark of such a paper.

Having a “D” as a final course grade suggests that the student completed (albeit not very successfully) just enough of the course requirements to escape getting an out-and-out failure. Perhaps the student only completed in-class writing assignments (which were done in a perfunctory manner) and never did any outside assignments. Class participation and general attendance may also have been poor. While it is possible that a “D” student may have acceptable writing skills, getting a “D” for the course means that such skills as may exist were never demonstrated to the instructor’s satisfaction.

**NOTE:** Any grade in the “D” range reflects minimal skill and/or effort on the part of the student. Application of standard knowledge of grammar, syntax, and argumentative / narrative form is poor. **Work in this range is NOT college level writing.**

**F ( 0.0 ... Failure )**

A paper receiving an “F” has failed to meet the requirements of the assignment on many levels. It may not address the issue under discussion sufficiently or it may even side-step it entirely. There may also be severe mechanical problems that make the paper unreadable. Students should realize, however, that sometimes a paper can fail for content even if their grammar is acceptable – or vice versa. For a written piece to be effective, it has to be correct in content *and* form. Of course, an “F” can also be earned for non-submission of any assignment or for lateness, as per the instructor’s stated policy in the course syllabus.

Earning an “F” for a Composition course reflects a consistent lack of effort on the part of the student, who may have done some or all of the following:

- a) failed to submit any (or most) assignments;
- b) failed to revise and produce multiple drafts when asked to do so;
- c) failed to participate in class activities;
- d) failed to meet deadlines;
- e) failed to attend conferences or tutoring sessions on a regular basis, if at all;
- f) failed to apply editorial advice given by instructor;
- g) failed to attend class regularly;
- h) failed the Proficiency Exam (in developmental or Part I courses).

**NOTE:** *Ultimately, you, as an SPU student, are in charge of your own success or failure!*

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