

Responding Effectively
to
Student Writing

Sharon L. Zuber
College of William and Mary
Writing Resources Center Director
slzube@wm.edu

Evaluating Student Writing

Begins with:

1. Designing good assignments.
2. Clarifying your grading criteria.
3. Devoting class time to generating ideas and explaining the objectives of the assignment.
4. Having students submit something to you early in the writing process (have students be the first readers of each other's drafts).
5. Using group or individual conferences early in the writing process.

Tips for Writing Comments on Students' Papers

1. Comment first on ideas and organization: encourage students to solve global problems before turning to local problems. Challenge writers to deepen and complicate their thought at a level appropriate to their intellectual development.
2. Write end comments that reveal your interest in the students' ideas. Begin with a positive comment then make specific recommendations for improvement.
3. Avoid over-commenting. Resist the urge to circle every error. Research suggests that students will improve more quickly if they are required to find and correct their own errors. Put minimal comments on finished products that will not be revised.
4. When marking for organization, use marginal comments to indicate places where structure becomes confusing.
 - How does this paragraph fit with your thesis?
 - What's the point of this section?
 - Your introduction made me expect to hear about X next, but this is about Y.
5. Note places where sentence-level problems cause genuine confusion (as opposed to annoyance).
6. If a student has made a substantial numbers of errors, either withhold or lower the grade until the student has re-edited the paper. Students with severe sentence-level problems may need personal attention.
7. If your class size permits, try alternatives to written comments such as one-on-one conferences, small group workshops, and audio tapes.
8. Think of comments as ways to prompt revision as opposed to justifying a grade by pointing out errors.
9. Give students a chance to revise their papers.
10. Make your comments legible.

Don't forget to recommend your college's Writing Center!

Goals and Minimal Skills for Lower-division Writing Proficiency

Goals:

Students who complete the lower-division writing proficiency should be aware of the rhetorical nature of academic writing: i.e., that the task of academic writing is to clearly and persuasively communicate their ideas. They should also learn that the process of writing includes revision and self-editing. Ultimately, they should aspire to prose that communicates complex and sophisticated ideas through a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice.

Skills:

A well-written academic essay:

- Shows an awareness of the audience's needs and expectations within the context of a specific assignment and/or discipline.
- Presents a convincing argument that is analytic, interpretive, or explanatory in nature and exhibits independent thought and engagement with the subject matter.
- Articulates a focused thesis.
- Supports the thesis with persuasive evidence.
- Uses logical transitions to guide the reader through the stages of a compelling argument.
- Has an effective introduction and conclusion.
- Contains well-structured paragraphs.
- Uses concrete and precise language.
- Uses an engaging, concise style characterized by strong verbs and active voice.
- Shows the writer's conscious command of the elements of a sentence by avoiding disruptive grammatical errors, such as dangling modifiers, subject/verb disagreement, vague or ambiguous pronoun antecedents, and mistakes in punctuation.
- Synthesizes outside sources, when used, into the larger argument.
- Uses appropriate documentation form.

Designing Good Assignments

- Use a variety of assignments throughout the semester so students have repeated opportunities to write/speak and get feedback.

Informal: 5-minute freewriting, Discussion Board posts, in-class micro-themes, journals, response papers, handouts to accompany oral presentations

Formal: response papers, longer papers written in stages (may or may not require research), exams

When possible, sequence the assignments.

- Make the purpose of the assignment clear and relate to course objectives.
- Provide background, definitions, explanations--the context
- Suggest strategies for approaching the material including audience considerations (what should a reader/listener know by the conclusion?)
- Include interactive components (peer review of drafts, library tour, primary research such as interviews)
- Specify the grading criteria and details of the assignment – length, citation style, format, rubric. (Will the same criteria be used throughout the semester or be different for each assignments? Will a draft be given a grade? If so, how will it be weighted?)
- Include the due dates (proposals, thesis statements, annotated bibliographies, drafts)
- Provide models (online or hard copy). Have students “grade” a sample paper using the criteria by which they will be evaluated. Help the class generate strategies for successfully completing the specific assignment.

COVERING CONTENT

By Thom Keyes,
Our Lady of the Lake University, TX
keyes@lake.ollusa.edu

Editor's note: Our February article on how much content is enough continues to generate response. A sampling appears in our May issue, and we'd like to follow now with a response that takes us in a little different direction but gets to the same end point.

There is a delightfully ironic twist embedded in the ambiguous phrase "covering content." The obvious and intended meaning centers around the notion that covering more content means providing students with more knowledge in the subject. A second meaning exposes the view that in "covering content" we actually hide it from view like a blemish covered with makeup or a crime covered by some deception.

The assumption behind the first

meaning seems to be that if one knows certain facts one also understands them as well, and the more facts the more understanding. But a little reflection shows that neither is true. I may have memorized "E=MC²" and yet have no understanding of it. In other words, I don't have a clue as to how it fits into a larger theory, no idea as to how it was arrived at, no way of knowing how to test its truth, and no ability to expand it or to draw implications or consequences from it. So, the irony is that in the attempt to cover more content, we professors are in danger of doing just the opposite.

Thankfully, there is a third meaning to "covering content." It involves students actually thinking through the content in the sense of being able to organize it, analyze it, synthesize it, modify it, apply it, and evaluate it. This is the sense which leads to understanding. Unfortunately, it does not allow us to

"cover" a great deal in the first sense of the term, because doing it is so difficult and time consuming.

One of the main implications of this third meaning is that the effort to try to squeeze more content into a course is not the sort of goal we should even be contemplating. And the central practical consequence is that we should be redesigning our courses so as to get students to critically think through as much content as is possible, but this will be a good deal less than is now normally "covered."

To summarize, since our goal is to help students understand our subject and not just to have them memorize discrete facts about it, the whole question of how we can increase coverage is misguided. Instead, we should focus on the question of how we can assist students in the difficult and time consuming process of thinking through and understanding the material.

Keys to Designing Effective Assignments

Part 1 - General Guidelines for Assignments

Part 2 - Suggestions for Library Research Assignments

Part 1 - General Guidelines for Assignments

Tie the assignment to established course objectives and inform students of the assignment's purpose and how it relates to the objectives.

- Promotes greater understanding and mastery of course subject matter. Students who understand the reason for an assignment and how it will enhance their subject knowledge should be more motivated to complete the work.

Consider student capabilities and resources when developing assignments.

- It strengthens the likelihood of students becoming or continuing to be "active participants in learning," and increases the opportunity for student success in achieving educational goals. While professors need not lower standards to ensure that students can complete assignments, some questions should be answered before introducing an activity:
 - Do my students already have the background knowledge and skills to approach this assignment or do I need to prepare them with mini-activities that systematically lead to this project?
 - Would this assignment be more successful if students could work collaboratively to draw upon individual strengths?
 - Am I asking students to complete an activity that requires a significant leap beyond the text and supplementary research materials to develop and support a thesis?
 - Should I require regular progress updates from students so I can monitor their efforts and steer them back on course as needed?
- Teaching research strategies in class would also ensure that all students know the process. During this time, allow them to practice shaping topics into research questions. The professor might also provide examples of they themselves proceed in this regard.

Provide reality-based, problem-solving activities that expand students capacity for critical thinking.

- This will encourage students to develop knowledge of past and current practices related to the subject matter and develops analytical skills.
- Grade bibliographies for quality of sources, balance, etc., not just for style. If they will be using Web sources for the project, have them develop criteria for judging the quality of those sources, or present your own, and discuss the criteria in class.

Use technological tools to enhance assignments.

- Provides unique access to information and promotes discussion that may be inhibited by traditional class-related communication methods.

- Web pages allow ongoing access to class-related information that can be updated easily and can link to related sites on the web. Software programs such as Authorware include the ability to give instant feedback to students. WebBoard, WebCT, Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment, or email (all available on campus) offer various levels of real-time and delayed-time discussion opportunities.

Prepare a clearly outlined, written assignment sheet.

- Avoids misunderstanding by allowing students to refer to original instructions when needed. Having another faculty member proofread the assignment sheet can obviously correct misspellings, but can also identify unclear information that may benefit from revised wording.
- Make sure to define vague or unfamiliar terms.

Consult a reading/writing specialist at the college to identify potential assignment-related problem areas.

- Minimizes anxiety related to student perceptions of course requirements and helps target essential skills necessary for understanding the subject matter.
- Review syllabus and assignments with a developmental studies faculty member, noting where modifications may be made for students with deficient reading/writing skills while preserving course objectives.

Part 2 - Suggestions for Library Research Assignments

Structure research assignments that suggest a logical progression from topic selection through presentation of results.

- Provides an understandable and manageable framework for a research project. Assignments which require students to locate a fact or resource available only in a unique undefined tool or source cause frustration and promote minimal insight into a topic.
- Ask students to select an innovation, application, or discovery on a topic (e.g., nondestructive testing, records management, etc.) and write an annotated bibliography after researching articles in library databases and World Wide Web sites. The students will choose a topic, decide what word(s) would retrieve the most pertinent information, and review results in preparation for writing the annotations.

Allow "structured" freedom of choice in how to approach and deliver a research assignment.

- This will encourage critical thinking, creativity, and enthusiasm about topic selection, conducting research, and presenting results. It also prevents student frustration when students are not limited to traditional library resources. Avoids narrowly constructed or obscure fact-finding assignments that promote regurgitation of data.
- Provide a list of varied topic possibilities that are updated regularly and/or allow the possibility for personal interest topics off the list upon approval. Let the class, group, or individual select information from a variety of possible source types (e.g., interview, personal experience, government document, television program, periodical, etc.) designated by the professor. Consider including innovative presentation methods for research projects (role-play, game show, etc.)

- Additionally, provide resource lists to give students a starting point. Check to see if there is a Research Subject Guide available for your area.

Consider modifying research paper assignments that directly document student work in an effort to minimize plagiarism.

- Promotes critical thinking on why particular sources were chosen for inclusion in a research effort. Enables understanding of research as a non-linear process that needs continual refinement. Involves objective and subjective reflection on the topic that goes beyond superficial acquaintance with subject matter.
- Students can prepare an annotated and evaluative bibliography of references, a journal that documents the research process, and/or an oral or written defense of research findings including personal viewpoint.

Review research assignment (initially and annually thereafter) with division librarian to assess the availability of support materials

- Reduces students' frustration when they can readily access databases, titles in a reading list, reserve readings, reference works, and other pertinent information from our library instead of needing to travel to a university library or complete interlibrary loan request forms for basic research needs.
- If the assignment requires the use of specific sources, give students a list of them and check on availability and access. Web pages may have disappeared, and new sources and ways of accessing information may have replaced old ones since the last time you assigned this project. Reference Librarians might be the most helpful in this regard.
- Classroom faculty are encouraged to call or email a librarian to help determine what is currently available and what has changed since the assignment was last given. If the entire class is researching one topic, please place sufficient support material on reserve to provide equal access to needed information.

Schedule a librarian-led instruction session to coincide with assignment distribution.

- Improves understanding of research process in relation to a specific assignment. Allows students an opportunity to begin research and ask for clarification from the professor and/or librarian.
- Although they may have used the library for other classes, students may not be familiar with tools and strategies needed to complete a new assignment. Librarians can discuss locating and evaluating books, articles, and Internet sites. Even today not all students are knowledgeable about computers, the Internet, or the effective use of search engines to find useful and reliable Internet information.

This article was extracted from North Harris College Library's "Keys to Designing Effective Assignments." <http://nhclibrary.nhmccd.edu/library/instruction/keys.html#top>

Additional Source:

*"Designing Effective Research Assignments." Duke University Libraries.
<http://www.lib.duke.edu/services/instruction/assignments.htm>*

Sequencing Assignments

Writing 101

1. Summary—a single paragraph

Requires that a student identify a main idea and support (hierarchy of ideas), basic argument structure in original, and paragraph organization

2. Critique—an essay that includes a revision of the summary paragraph

Trains students to think critically about the proof in the original and come up with counter arguments. Encourages discussion.

3. Synthesis—an essay that synthesizes several articles and uses MLA style of documentation

Students must construct their own thesis, sustain an argument, gather proof. A good time to focus on style and sentences.

#1-3 the class uses the same articles

For longer paper:

Repeat the above pattern; this time students choose their own topic and articles
Include a library exercise—use secondary sources outside the textbook

Introduce proper documentation style, discuss plagiarism

Oral presentation of final paper/argument at rough draft stage

Sequence: This format moves students from summarizing to developing their own argument/analysis (from consumers to producers)

Film Freshman Seminar

Response Papers

1. Thesis
2. Proof/Paragraph Organization
3. Sentences/style
4. All of the above

Response #4 may replace one of the first four papers or be “extra credit.”

Vocabulary quizzes on Blackboard

Discussion topics on Blackboard (4 required)

Formal Paper—includes library research and proper documentation.

Film papers include a segmentation or outline of the movie.

Sequence: From global elements (thesis and support) to local elements (sentences and style)

FILM 150W: *Introduction to Film Studies*
Final Paper, Prof. Zuber

OBJECTIVE: To construct an argument/interpretation about a film of your choice using the skills in analysis you have developed this semester.

ASSIGNMENT: For this 6-8 page essay, you have three options:

1. Analyze any film on the syllabus, but one about which you haven't written.
2. Compare/contrast two films, one from the second half of the semester and one from before *Fall Break*.
3. Choose any film to analyze, with my permission.

You may use a combination of approaches (historical, ideological, cultural, generic, etc.) to analyze your film(s). The preliminary stages of this project will require some basic research. Use MLA style of documentation (See handbook for details).

PREPARATION:

1. Review the vocabulary from the FILM ART chapters we have read. A quick way to review these terms is to read through the glossary at the back of FILM ART and WRITING ABOUT FILM.
2. Recommended: Corrigan, Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

SCHEDULE: Use the following due dates to pace yourself.

Oct. 19 (Thurs.): Library Introduction to databases and film resources. Meet at Swem for REGULAR class time.

Oct. 30 (Mon.): Post your Topic Worksheet (on back) as an attachment to the Discussion Board by midnight.

Nov. 9 (Thurs.): There will be no class today; I will be attending a film conference in Texas.

Nov. 10 (Fri): Turn in a segmentation of your film (typed, single spaced) to the folder outside my office.

Dec. 1 (Fri): Post Draft to Blackboard for Peer Review. (At least 3-4 pages, thesis and evidence). Hand in "skeleton" to me – you may email this form to me.

Dec. 5 (Tues.): Post Comments.

Final Paper/Portfolio due at your exam time (Friday, Dec. 15th, 1:30 a.m.). Include the following,

- An introductory statement, no more than two pages, reflecting what you have learned about writing and the study of film—a self-analysis versus a course analysis.
- Response Papers with drafts, checklists, comments, and revisions.
- Visual analyses (Quiz #7 taken in the class before Thanksgiving break).
- Handout from your oral report.

Topic Worksheet

October 30th: Post your Topic Worksheet as an attachment to the Discussion Board by midnight. I will respond online. Include the following information:

1. The name(s) of films you will be analyzing. If you are using a film not screened in this course, include the director, year, and length for the film.
2. Explain, as specifically as you can, what interests you about this film(s); what questions did you have about this film that led to your research? What do you plan to argue about the film? How will you convince your readers (your classmates) to care about your idea and/or this film?
3. A **working** thesis—a complete sentence.
4. Using MLA format (use your handbook and/or Corrigan for models), cite three secondary sources (at least one that **you have located physically in Swem**) that might help you with your project (reviews, articles, and/or books).
5. Select one of these sources and annotate it: provide a five-sentence description of the source.

Oral Presentation of Final Paper

PURPOSE: To give the class a “sneak preview” or “trailer” of your final paper.

SPECIFICS:

1. After choosing, researching, and writing about your chosen film, this presentation gives you the opportunity to summarize the argument developed in your final paper for the other members of this seminar.
2. The presentation should be **NO MORE** than 8 minutes in length, counting the film clip [clip(s) should be less than 2 minutes].
3. Delivery should be extemporaneous (practiced but not read word-for-word). You may use 3X5 note cards--do not put the entire text on cards.
4. At the beginning of class, hand in to me, on a sheet of paper, a brief outline of your presentation. Include the following:
 - a. Your Name
 - b. Your title
 - c. Your thesis statement
 - d. The main supporting points of your argument with one example for each point
 - e. A brief description of the clip that you will show.

Use the following criteria when planning your presentation (see the WRC oral presentation checklist on back):

1. Subject--sufficiently narrowed
2. Introduction
Gains attention, relevant to audience, contains the central idea, previews the presentation
3. Organization
Contains effective main divisions, clear sub-points, transitions, and clear explanations.
4. Supporting Materials
Number/quality/variety; clearly identified; relevant; sound reasoning
5. Physical Delivery
Extemporaneous; eye contact with people other than the professor
6. Conclusion
Effective final thought
7. Outline
Neatness; how well it follows the presentation

How I Assign Letter Grades

In grading "thesis papers" . . . I ask myself the following set of questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Does the thesis address itself to an appropriate question or topic?
3. Is the paper free from long stretches of quotations and summaries that exist only for their own sakes and remain unanalyzed?
4. Can the writer produce complete sentences?
5. Is the paper free from basic grammatical errors?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," I give the paper some kind of C. If the answer to most of the questions is "no," its grade will be even lower.

For papers which have emerged unscathed thus far, I add the following questions:

6. How thoughtful is the paper? Does it show real originality?
7. How adequate is the thesis? Does it respond to its question or topic in a full and interesting way? Does it have an appropriate degree of complexity?
8. How well organized is the paper? Does it stick to the point? Does every paragraph contain a clear topic sentence? If not, is another kind of organizing principle at work? Are the transitions well made? Does it have a real conclusion, not simply a stopping place?
9. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
10. Does the writing betray any special elegance?
11. Above all, can I hear a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice speaking to me (or to another audience, if that what the writer intends) as I read the paper?

Depending on my answers to such questions, I give the paper some kind of A or some kind of B.

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Correction Symbols

<i>abbr</i>	faulty abbreviation 23a	:	colon 18b
<i>ad</i>	adverb or adjective 13	↓	apostrophe 19
<i>add</i>	add needed word 4	" "	quotation marks 20
<i>agr</i>	agreement 10, 12a	.	period 21a
<i>appr</i>	inappropriate language 9	?	question mark 21b
<i>art</i>	article 16a	!	exclamation point 21c
<i>awk</i>	awkward	—	dash 21d
<i>cap</i>	capital letter 22	()	parentheses 21e
<i>case</i>	case 12c, 12d	[]	brackets 21f
<i>cs</i>	comma splice 15	...	ellipsis mark 21g
<i>dm</i>	dangling modifier 7c	/	slash 21h
<i>-ed</i>	<i>-ed</i> ending 11a	<i>pass</i>	ineffective passive 2, 11d
<i>emph</i>	emphasis 2	<i>ref</i>	pronoun reference 12b
<i>ESL</i>	English as a second language 16	<i>run-on</i>	run-on sentence 15
<i>frag</i>	sentence fragment 14	<i>-s</i>	<i>-s</i> ending on verb 10, 16b
<i>fs</i>	fused sentence 15	<i>sexist</i>	sexist language 9c, 12a
<i>hyph</i>	hyphen 24b	<i>shift</i>	confusing shift 5
<i>irreg</i>	irregular verb 11a	<i>sl</i>	slang 9b
<i>ital</i>	italics (underlining) 23c	<i>sp</i>	misspelled word 24a
<i>jarg</i>	jargon 9a	<i>s-v</i>	subject-verb agreement 10
<i>lc</i>	use lowercase letter 22	<i>t</i>	verb tense 11b
<i>mix</i>	mixed construction 6	<i>usage</i>	see Glossary of Usage
<i>mm</i>	misplaced modifier 7a-b, 7d	<i>v</i>	voice 2, 11d
<i>mood</i>	mood 11c	<i>var</i>	sentence variety 8
<i>num</i>	numbers 23b	<i>vb</i>	problem with verb 11, 16b-c
<i>om</i>	omitted word 4, 16a, 16c	<i>w</i>	wordy 1
<i>p</i>	punctuation	//	faulty parallelism 3
↑	comma 17a-i	^	insert
<i>no,</i>	no comma 17j	x	obvious error
;	semicolon 18a	#	insert space
		○	close up space

FIXING WRITING PROBLEMS

By Rob Weir, Bay Path College, MA
Rweir@mtboiyoake.edu

If we learn nothing else from the pop culture that our undergraduates consume, we should understand that a good "hook" goes a long ways. With that in mind, I developed my own take on the David Letterman Top Ten List. The sheet is headed with a silly clip art cartoon of a mechanic and titled as it is below. I tried to make the list irreverent and catchy, so that students can more easily "get" what I'm preaching.

Now when students come to my office intending to revise a paper (I have instituted a system whereby students can do this with short argument papers they write for my history courses), they must make specific reference to items from the list that are problematic in their papers and put forth at least rudimentary plans for addressing them. If they don't, I send them away and tell them to contemplate matters more thoroughly for a future appointment. Thus far, rewrites have been better and the concepts that precede them have been clearer and more focused.

Whether students go on to do graduate work or to compile top ten lists for David Letterman is of secondary consequence. If a few lowly "hooks" on my part can net better writers, I'll continue to cut bait.

ROB'S TOP TEN WAYS TO FIX WRITING PROBLEMS

10. *It is polite to point!*

If your paper doesn't have a workable thesis, it's likely to drift. A good thesis does two things: it states (in affirmative terms) what you intend to prove in your paper (its main point), and it lays out a plan for accomplishing this. For example: World War I resulted from a series of tensions that developed among European nations at the turn of the century. Among these were imperialism, militarism, and an unstable alliance system.

Sometimes it pays to be narrow minded.

Students get into trouble when they try to do too much. You can't possibly write about *everything* there is to say

about a subject. Notice how the sample thesis above limits the paper to just *three* aspects of World War I.

8. *Sink rocks, don't skip stones.*

Pursue a few things in detail. No one wants to read a paper that merely mentions things; discuss them. The usual rule of thumb is that it's better to say a lot about a few things than a very little about many things. Think of it as the difference between skipping a stone across a pond versus tossing a rock to the bottom. Be a rock when you write.

7. *Oh yeah, says who?*

Don't even bother to quote unless it's clear *in the text itself* who it is you're quoting. You can't accomplish this with a footnote; you *must* identify the speaker in the text. Example: According to historian Mary Beth Norton, "The prosperity of the late Gilded Age largely ignored industrial workers."

6. *So what?*

There is a difference between historical evidence and trivia. If the material doesn't relate to your thesis, it might be interesting but it's not relevant. It is also your job to *analyze* the material you present. Unless you tell your reader why something is important, your information is simply random material.

5. *Finish your veggies...and your thoughts!*

Don't forget to tell the entire story and to tell your reader why you have included what you chose. Your motives may be clear in your mind, but your audience reads what's on the paper, not what's in your mind.

4. *One good example is worth a thousand colorful adjectives.*

Be specific. Every time you make a point, have at least one example to illustrate it. Any hack can use a thesaurus and string together vague adjectives, but a good writer can make her work live through examples that make vague points tangible and real. Don't tell me something was "really bad"; explain what made it bad.

3. *Who the hell are "the people?"*

Avoid general categories that are so vague they are meaningless. Be concrete and specific. For example: "The Indians" is a vague phrase: "Cherokees in south-

west Georgia in the 1820s" is specific. And the "American or French or Japanese ... people" as a whole *never* agreed on a single thing, so don't tell me they did! Tell me which people you mean.

2. *Don't put socks in your underwear drawer.*

The vast majority of "organizational" problems come when the writer fails to keep related material in the same place. Thoroughly discuss a topic, then move on to another point. For example, if you're discussing Natives and slaves in a paper, discuss each separately. Don't begin to discuss Natives, switch to slaves, and then jump back to Natives. Your paper should be like an orderly chest of drawers, with each distinct item in its own place.

1. *Proofread and edit.*

This is number one because so few actually do it. Careless errors, clunky phrases, spelling mistakes, and deplorable grammar abound simply because too many writers think they're done once they put the final period onto the page. Not so, Moe. Read your work. If what you've written sounds wrong to you, it's not going to sound any better to me. Remember: It's no sin to not know how to spell something. It *is* a sin not to look it up. And how hard is it to run spellcheck?

Editor's note: The author has graciously given his permission for individuals to make copies of this list for distribution to students in classes. Permission to reprint the list in other publications must be secured from The Teaching Professor's managing editor.

GOOD TEACHING

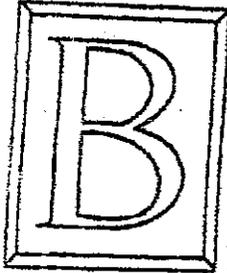
FROM PAGE 1

sudden happens. It's about the former student who says your course changed her life. It's about another telling you that your course was the best one he's ever taken. Good teachers practice their craft not for the money or because they have to, but because they truly enjoy it and because they want to. Good teachers couldn't imagine doing anything else.



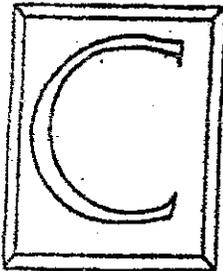
- . rich content--original ideas, clear thesis with excellent detail and evidence
- . stylistic finesse--clear and interesting opening and closing, artful transitions between paragraphs
- . varied sentence structure, precise diction and tone
- . careful organization and development of ideas
- . mastery of grammar and mechanics
- . memorable ideas which leave the reader satisfied and eager to reread the paper

A "B" PAPER CONTAINS:



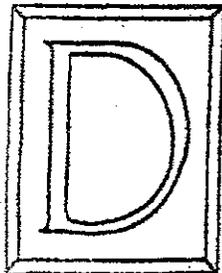
- . substantial information
- . specific ideas logically ordered, well-developed and unified around a clear organizing principle
- . interesting and connected opening and closing paragraphs
- . few grammatical and mechanical errors
- . transitions between paragraphs that are mostly smooth
- . varied sentence structure
- . diction which is more concise and precise than "C" paper
- . pleasurable reading with few distractions

A "C" PAPER CONTAINS:



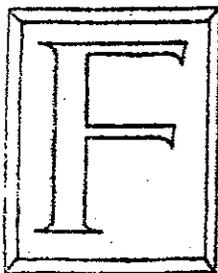
- . competent but thin and predictable information with vague generalities
- . adequate organization and development
- . superficial and perfunctory opening and closing paragraphs
- . bumpy transitions between paragraphs
- . monotonous and choppy sentences
- . imprecise diction and unintentional repetitions and redundancies
- . some mechanical and grammatical errors
- . ideas lacking in originality, imagination

A "D" PAPER CONTAINS:



- . rudimentary treatment and development of subject
- . unclear and ineffective organization
- . awkward and ambiguous sentences
- . many serious grammatical and mechanical errors
- . an overall impression of haste--not a revised and corrected piece of writing

AN "F" PAPER CONTAINS:



- . a superficial treatment of the subject
- . ideas lacking in organization
- . unclear and puzzling diction
- . frequent mechanical and grammatical errors
- . ideas, organization and style below the acceptable level of college writing

*Based on Robert Bain's, "Reading Student Papers," *College Composition and Communication* 25 (Oct.1974), 307-309.

Grading Checklist

Name _____

Paper _____

- _____ The title hints at the thesis
- _____ The paper is formatted correctly
- _____ The pages are numbered

An "A" paper has:

- _____ a clear, argumentative thesis appropriate for the topic and audience
- _____ original ideas that reveal depth of critical engagement with the text
- _____ organization that builds to a conclusion
- _____ coherent paragraph order
- _____ a claim well-supported with textual evidence
- _____ supporting points fully developed by details, examples, reasons
- _____ each stage of the argument has a clearly stated point
- _____ subtle transitions used within and between paragraphs
- _____ varied, "tight" sentence structure, strong verbs
- _____ few (or no) errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling
- _____ a clear and interesting introduction that "baits" the reader
- _____ a conclusion that does more than summarize the main points

A "B" paper has:

- _____ a clearly stated thesis
- _____ good, if somewhat mechanical organization, clearly defined stages of the argument
- _____ ideas do more than state the obvious
- _____ development evident but not consistent or balanced
- _____ transitions used between paragraphs but could be stronger
- _____ uses varied sentence structure, active voice
- _____ few problems with grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling
- _____ the introduction provides a lead or funnel to thesis
- _____ a conclusion that psychologically closes the essay

A "C" paper has:

- _____ a competent thesis but thin and predictable information with vague generalities
- _____ organization that is evident but lacks control and consistency (points ordered but not to the best advantage)
- _____ points that need more development
- _____ paragraphs without clearly stated topics
- _____ parts that stray from the main idea
- _____ few or bumpy transitions
- _____ wordy and imprecise sentences
- _____ evident, but not distracting, problems with grammar, usage, and spelling
- _____ superficial and perfunctory opening and closing paragraphs

A paper in need of revision:

- _____ does not address the topic or does so superficially
- _____ lacks a thesis or the thesis has a weak, non-argumentative claim
- _____ has unclear and ineffective organization
- _____ has superficial development
- _____ has awkward and ambiguous sentences
- _____ has grammar errors that interfere with the communication of ideas
- _____ lacks a tone appropriate for audience, purpose

All papers with a check in the revision section must be rewritten. The revision is due one week after discussing the paper with me in conference. The original and final grades will be averaged. Revisions must be accompanied by the original paper, its checklist, and any peer comments.

Take-Home Exam I—Cover Sheet

Your name:

Title of essay:

Number of words in the essay (not including footnotes, bibliography):

In one complete sentence, summarize the argument of this essay:

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Did you number the pages of the essay?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Did you run a spell checker?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Did you proofread <i>after</i> running spelling and grammar checks?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Did you cite all ideas that are not your own and are not common knowledge, even if they are paraphrased?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Did you use Chicago-formatted footnotes or endnotes?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Did you attached a Chicago-formatted bibliography?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Does each paragraph in the body of the essay include a topic sentence that states <i>your</i> point (as opposed to summarizing the text in question)?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Do you present and discuss concrete textual evidence for each claim you make?* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Did you reconsider, revise, or rewrite the introductory paragraph after you finished the essay? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Did you go to the History Writing Resources Center or the Tucker Writing Center to seek assistance for this essay? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*If the answer to this question is no, please go back and correct the problem before turning in the paper.

In accordance with the provisions of William and Mary's Honor Code, I certify that I have neither given nor received assistance on this exam (unless I have done so within the provisions outlined on the reverse—meeting with a HWRC/Tucker consultant or Professor Koloski).

Signature _____

Paper Evaluation Sheet
Koloski

How does the paper rate on the following attributes?	excellent	good	fair	poor
Successfully addresses the assigned topic?				
Incorporates original ideas and/or approaches?				
Demonstrates historical accuracy (delivers an interpretation which is plausible given <i>all</i> available evidence)?				
Asks and answers the "so what?" question (presents an analysis rather than a summary or description)?				
Presents a strong, argumentative thesis in the first paragraph?				
Incorporates strong supporting points into a clear organization structure, using analytical topic sentences, strong transitions, and focused paragraphs?				
Bases supporting points on concrete textual evidence?				
Uses textual analysis to develop each supporting point fully?				
Shows stylistic finesse?				
Remains free of grammatical and proofreading errors?				
Follows guidelines for formal academic writing (diction, citations, spacing, cover sheet, etc., as outlined in handouts)?				

Additional comments:

Evaluation Scale for Quantitative and Scientific Work

	EXC.	GOOD	SATIS.	DEF.	N/A
KNOWLEDGE					
1. Basic methods of arithmetic, geometry, algebra, and statistics					
2. Basic concepts of proportionality, similarity, order relationships, exponentiation					
3. Use of mathematical notation					
COMPREHENSION					
1. Translation of verbal material to mathematical form					
2. Translation of mathematical information into verbal form					
3. Interpretation of charts and graphs					
4. Understanding of estimates and approximations					
5. Number sense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonableness of numerical answers • Order of magnitude 					
6. Extrapolation, forward and backward					
APPLICATION					
1. Construction of charts and graphs					
2. Solution of simple mathematical problems					
3. Demonstration of correct usage of a method or procedure					
SYNTHESIS					
1. Proposal of a plan for an experiment					
2. Formulation of a new scheme of classifying objects					
EVALUATION					
1. Distinguishing testable from non-testable conjectures					
2. Judgment of the adequacy with which conclusions are supported by data					

Developed by the College of William and Mary Portfolio Analysis project; based on the work of Norman E. Gronlund (Stating Behavioral Objectives for Classroom Instruction. London: Macmillan, 1970).

HOW WE GRADE: A PROCESS ALWAYS IN NEED OF REVIEW

How many articles on grading have we published over the years? Not enough? Too many? It is a topic we regularly revisit. And we do so for two reasons: 1) it may well be the toughest part of the teaching job; and 2) whatever systems we use, they can always be refined, tinkered with, and, hopefully, improved.

A recent article focusing on how we help students to understand grades covers some of the conceptual ground we often forget as we put together the bits and pieces of a specific grading scheme for a particular class. Consider these key concepts from the measurement theory literature as they are summed and highlighted in the fine article referenced below.

- "Grading systems should be based on performance benchmarks." (p. 102) The idea here is to take each of the main levels in your grading system (A, B, C, whatever) and describe an appropriate kind of performance for that level. The article has a wonderful table that illustrates what each of these levels looks like in two different psych courses. The key skill here involves your ability to describe clearly the differences between each of the levels.
- "Grading systems should be valid and recognizable." (p. 102) When a grading system is valid it "accurately reflects whatever quality it is supposed to measure." (p. 102) The easiest way for this to happen in most courses is to tie the grading system to the course goals — those statements of what it is you want students to know and be able to do with respect to the content and processes of the course. A thoughtful analysis here brings you up against some interesting questions. For example, is attendance enough of a part of what students should know and be able to do that it merits counting in the course grade? Grading systems are recognizable when students see how assessment measures relate to the goals, content, and processes of the course.
- "Grading systems should be reliable and consistent." (p. 102) Multiple-choice tests score well here because it doesn't matter who grades them; the results will always be the same. Papers are

sometimes a problem in this regard. And consistency has to do with the way you apply the grading standards. It's a principle we all endorse in theory, but in the presence of students who "try hard" and plead in other very effective ways, it's tough to be equally fair to all.

- "The grading system should be logical and based on real differences in performance." (p. 102) Those final grades should be a logical extension of how the individual benchmarks have been applied across the semester. And they should be based on real differences, not just statistical artifacts. There is probably not going to be a real performance difference between the 89.4 that gets a B (even a B+) and the 90 that gets an A (or even an A-). And those small distinctions are never going to make much sense to the student who missed the higher grade by a fraction of a percent.

If we apply these principles to the creation and implementation of a grading system, it will be a better system. What remains is the issue of helping students understand why and how a particular grading system works. The article proceeds with some excellent suggestions as to how that might be accomplished.

- "Give the students the written description of the grading system to compare with their own grade." (p. 105) This is a description of the criteria for the individual assignment, not just the general description that most often appears in the syllabus.
- "Impose time for thinking between the receipt of a grade and any discussion of it." (p. 105) Let the passions flame and then die down. Give the student and yourself time to think and reflect. Asking students to submit grade objections in writing forces them to slow down and make a logical case, which is generally much easier to answer than the emotional one.
- "Have the students attempt to apply the grading system with a common example." (p. 105) This can be an excellent exam review strategy. Distribute an essay question, an answer to it, and the grading criteria you'd apply to it. With all that in hand, let the students

individually or collectively grade the response. They can then compare and contrast their assessment with the grade you would give the essay.

- "Have students participate in the setting of general standards for grading." (p. 105) Obviously this particular approach must be used with discretion and it may not be appropriate for all course levels, but it is an excellent way for students to begin to understand how grading systems work. Perhaps they can do this with a hypothetical assignment, one that might be related to a subsequent one. Or perhaps they can provide a collection of criteria from which you will assemble a set to be used for a given assignment.
- "In the actual discussion of a grade, adhere to the rules of good communication." (p. 105) Keep the focus on the grade, and do not get the individual involved. Try not to let the discussion become confrontational or adversarial. Remember that the conversation is fundamentally about how the grading system works. It's a conversation about a learning experience. It shouldn't be defensive and won't be so long as you have designed and are applying your grading system with the principles above in mind.

Reference: Svinicki, Marilla D. (summer 1998). Helping students understand grades. *College Teaching*, 46 (3), 101-105. ♣

ASSESSMENT...

FROM PAGE 1

patterns of overall student performance capable of helping identify and inform needed curricular revisions." (p. 111)

The article proceeds with a collection of recommendations for doing institutional-level assessment. It's a rich piece that in six well-organized pages (minus the references) updates one's understanding of where the assessment movement appears to be headed.

Reference: Ewell, Peter T. (April 1998). National trends in assessing student learning. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 107-113. ♣

Responding Effectively to Student Writing

Sharon Zuber, English
Writing Resources Center
College of William and Mary

Responding to Student Work (cont'd)

- ◆ Grade using a rubric
- ◆ Make your comments legible; consider typing them or using the Comment function in WORD.
- ◆ End notes: emphasize your interest in the ideas and begin with a positive comment.
- ◆ When grading final papers, calibrate your grades

Keep Evaluation in Mind When Designing Assignments

- ~ Relate writing assignments to course objectives; sequence when possible
- ~ Identify purpose, audience, format
- ~ Explain grading criteria (rubrics)
- ~ Provide a sample assignment

"Set Students up for Success"

Final Tips

- ◆ Have confidence in what you know makes good writing.
- ◆ Prioritize the writing skills you want to emphasize.
- ◆ Relate these skills to course objectives.
- ◆ When it comes to grading:

"Less can be More."

Responding to Student Work

- ◆ Read the entire paper before commenting
- ◆ Comment first on ideas and organization (global vs local).
- ◆ AVOID over-commenting; focus on one or two major points.
- ◆ Comment when it counts – more on draft, fewer on final copy. Put minimal comments on finished products that will not be revised.
- ◆ Use comments on drafts to prompt re-vision not just point out errors.

~ Learning to write well is a lifelong process.