

Criteria Governing the Evaluation of Assignments

Introduction

Assignments are evaluated based on whether a student has presented ideas in such a way that reflects integration of course material and critical thinking skills. Grades are assigned not according to competition among students (who is "the best") but according to expectations for a particular assignment relative to the material covered in class up to that point.

Overall presentation

The following characteristics reflected in the assignment are taken into account in grading papers:

- Overall clarity
- Clear thesis statement
- Understanding of issues
- Interaction with material
- Analytic ability
- Synthesis of material
- Formulation of ideas
- Use of arguments
- Use of resources
- Clear conclusion
- Structure and organization
- Style
- Grammar and Spelling
- Footnotes and Bibliography

Note: Content items are weighted more than stylistic items.

Rules of Thumb

1. The number of students with grades below 70 will normally exceed the number of students with A's and B's.
2. The number of students with grades in the B-range will normally exceed the number of students with grades in the A-range.
3. A normal failure rate in a first-year ranges from 15 to 20% of students in the class. A normal curve would suggest that about 2% of students would end up with an A, about 5% with an A-, and about 10% with a B+.

The ICE approach to grading

Current expectations are that university graduates will not only have a rich content-based knowledge-foundation but also that they will be effective problem-solvers and critical thinkers. Grading should reflect that expectation:

Ideas: For solely communicating ideas (i.e. content), students receive no higher a grade than 64.

Connections: In order to receive a grade on the range of 65-79, students need to demonstrate that they are able to make connections among various ideas and elements in the course. Students cannot make it into this grade range unless their paper has a thesis. How clear the thesis is and how well structured and executed the rest of the paper is in light of this thesis will determine where it falls in that range.

Extensions: Grades of 80 or above are reserved for students who can extend their argument to show what its implications are. For a low A, the thesis and the paper's structure need to be clear, the argument executed impeccably, and the paper written lucidly. For a straight A, the student also has to demonstrate the capacity for original thought. An A+ is not normally given.

Grade ranges

90-100, A+, Publishable. Assignment is of sufficient substance and style to be submitted to a refereed journal for publication.

85-89, A, Outstanding. Superior understanding of the subject matter. Evidence of original thinking and an extensive knowledge base. Careful, concise, critical analysis with a clear and well argued hypothesis based on the material. Shows a capacity to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate material. Shows a grasp of all the scholarly issues involved. Shows evidence of learning being extended beyond the initial learning situation. Clear thesis and conclusion. Well-researched and documented. Stylistically flawless.

80-84, A-, Excellent. Superior understanding of the subject matter. A careful analysis with some precision and attention to the details of the material. Shows some critical capacity and analytic ability and some original thinking. Needs a bit of fine-tuning of the details. Clear thesis and conclusion. Good research and documentation. Stylistically flawless.

75-79, B+, Very Good. Solid understanding of the subject matter. Good analysis and some critical reasoning. Reasonable understanding of relevant issues and familiarity with the material. Demonstrates a solid understanding of the relationship or connections among the basic concepts. Needs to be more concise or precise in details and more careful in forming arguments. Stylistically sound.

70-74, B, Good. Generally accurate account of the subject matter with acceptable analysis and some critical reasoning. Some interaction with relevant material. Demonstrates some understanding of the relationship or connection among the basic concepts. Needs more precision and attention to details and greater precision in the use of arguments. Some careless stylistic errors.

65-69, B-, Fine. Generally accurate description of the subject matter and an adequate grasp of the critical issues and ideas involved. Demonstrates rudimentary understanding of the relationship or connection among the basic concepts. Needs more attention to detail and better use of arguments. Some careless stylistic errors.

60-64, C+, Average. Acceptable treatment of the subject matter. Demonstrates an understanding of the basic facts, vocabulary, details, and elemental concepts. Shows an ability to deal with simple issues arising out of the material. Needs to explore the subject matter more fully and formulate ideas more clearly. Closer attention should be given to stylistic elements including sentence structure and paragraph organization.

55-59, C, Adequate. Generally acceptable treatment of the subject matter and issues. Demonstrates an awareness of the basic facts, vocabulary, details, and elemental concepts. Impressionistic or vague at points. Shows that the learning experience was profitable. Lacks clarity in formulating the issues and shows little or no evidence of critical reflection on the issues or data. Closer attention should be given to grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

50-54, C-, Minimally Acceptable. Adequate understanding and treatment of the data and issues, but imprecise, impressionistic or vague. Lacks clarity in expressing the issues and shows no evidence of critical reflection on the issues or data. Major problems related to issues of style.

0-49, F, Inadequate. Sloppy, imprecise or careless discussion of the material with little or no evidence of critical reflection. Stylistically flawed.