

**Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center
Hamilton College
Clinton, NY 13323**

Characteristics of Paper Grades

A Detailed understanding of the material; sound organization; few or no mechanical errors; clear, unambiguous sentences, perhaps with a touch of elegance. In the best A papers, a lively and intelligent voice speaks; the writer has insightful analysis, includes specific evidence, speaks to a clearly defined audience, and writes with clarity and grace.

B Clear thesis, organization, and development and well-supported ideas. Some minor mechanical errors but no major ones. Thought and effort have gone into the paper; the paper is solid but not striking. The writer has a definite point to make and makes it in an organized, competent way to a well-defined audience.

C A weak, fuzzy thesis and a few, possibly illogical, arguments to support it. Some major mechanical errors. Mostly summary, not analysis. Writer is confused about the topic. Other likely problems include no attention to audience; weak organization; misused words; and skimpy proofreading.

D The paper lacks a thesis; the writer exhibits serious misunderstanding of the material. The discussion is poorly organized; narrative stretches substitute for analysis. Major mechanical problems such as incomplete sentences and run-on sentences. The paper may be shorter than the assigned length. The writer does not have a substantial point to make and demonstrates serious writing and thinking problems.

F The paper has weaknesses even greater than those of a D paper.

Note to faculty: These guidelines were written for use in composition courses. You may wish to adapt them for use in your courses.

Adapted from: Harry Edmund Shaw, "Responding to Student Essays," Teaching Prose, A Guide for Writing Instructors, eds. Bogel and Gottschalk (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1984), pp.150-1.