

Grading Guide by Paul J. Croce, History and American Studies, Stetson University
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What do grades mean? Here is a way to understand my approach to grading. It is based on a metaphor about vision and clarity, and it is the most effective and evocative way I have discovered to explain my thinking about the process of evaluating student writing.... Imagine being in a helicopter looking over a town; from there, you can see the town clearly and understand the relationships of parts to the whole very well (that's an A). From the top of a building, you can still see a lot of the town, but not as clearly and without as good a grasp of the relations (that's B territory). As you go down the building, your perspective and clarity are more limited (and the grades go down from there too).

How do I evaluate student writing? To help you get to your highest possible height before you even turn in any writing, see the web Guides to Learning and Writing. To help you improve your writing after you have already turned in your essays, I will read your words and evaluate them, with comments along the way and with some general observations at the end. I can explain my thinking in this process with a metaphor as well. I serve as a filter on your prose: if it flows through clearly and smoothly, I will check it off or offer some exclamation of enthusiasm; if not, I will comment or point out the issue I perceive, often with a squiggly line. I try to catch issues to bring them to your attention. I aim to be constructive: to offer assessments for improvement, so that you can do your best, in my courses, in other courses, and in later work.

The importance of writing skills: Becoming the best writer you can be is deceptively difficult but central to undergraduate education—and at the root of being an educated person and an empowered citizen in a democracy. Most students have heard about thesis statements and organization so many times that doing this work can seem elementary. Writing well is about more than mechanics (although it certainly needs those rules to build on); writing well emerges from clear thinking and working at it will in turn help clarify your thinking too. My father liked to say “hard writing makes easy reading”—it was a tweet before the days of tweets! The reasons behind the particular rules of writing are that these are ways of conveying your thoughts effectively to the reader. This may sound abstract, but it is really very practical. When college educators speak of preparing students with skills that they can apply to a variety of graduate school and work settings, writing is Job One. And thinking clearly and writing well are ground floor skills that you can take anywhere—and that will take you anywhere. And this is the ultimate goal of class time, your writing, and my grading: to help you do good work—now and in your future.

Making References

The purpose of a reference is to allow other people to look at—or look up—your sources clearly. There are many different formats to use; I do not require any one format, but please be *clear and consistent*. The Brief Handbook, 4th edition, edited by Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandell (Wadsworth, 2004), available in my office, provides a good guide for both references within the text and in a works-cited list (pp. 179-205); and there are other good methods and standards. The Chicago Manual of Style is a classic; Stetson has both paper and electronic versions.

Here are a few basics (examples of a book and an article):

Pollack, Kenneth. The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq. New York: Random House, 2002.

Laine Bergeson, “The New Politics of Fashion: Clothes as if People Mattered.” Utne Reader November-December 2003: 18-19.

When making references in the text, you can use endnotes or, if using a bibliography, a brief reference in parentheses; and if the reference is to a course reading, you can use last name and page number in parentheses: for example, (McNeill, 104-05).