

Flexible Guideline to Grading and Assignment Descriptions —or “What does my grade mean?”

General description	Not complete/Off topic/Does not make sense	Lacking core characteristics	Fundamental principles not refined and core is lacking	Demonstration of fundamental principles	Understands and can EXPAND on fundamental principles	Superb (Mastery of fundamental principles)	Top 1% You're in the hall of fame
Grade	F	D	C-	C	B	A	HoF
Extended Description	You need to seek out help or perform the tasks assigned to you. Not acceptable in any way.	You completed the assignment, mostly, but have not demonstrated the basic principles of it.	You have barely passed the assignment but show effort towards understanding fundamental principles and communicate that understanding.	The writing is average in terms of style and organization but the essay grasps the material and principles enough to warrant passing the assignment.	You not only understand the material but can critique it in a way that questions or augments the fundamental principles.	You explain the material in such a way that you can <i>influence</i> the material and push people's thinking on the fundamental principles, while augmenting them.	Earn a recommendation from John for an internship, job, transfer, etc. You not only have mastered the material but do so gracefully and elegantly. The essay also recognizes its limitations and does not overstate its case.

While each assignment has distinct fundamental principles, four core characteristics are required as well:

1. **Detail**—I value essays that contain vivid imagery and concrete detail: that don't glide over the surface of things but examine particulars, that show rather than tell, that propel the reader forward, evoking something real in the world: actual people, places, and objects. Depth of exploration, therefore, is preferred over quantity of sub-topics: one deeply remembered and vividly recounted narrative, or an extended description of something stretched over several paragraphs, work better than the superficial treatment of many particulars. For some essays, these details will be in the form of evidence for claims.
2. **Surprise**—I value essays that stick in the mind. Essays with a distinctive voice or unique style, essays which take risks (artistic, intellectual, etc.), even when they don't fully succeed, are highly valued. I am weary of cliché and easy sentiment. I like reading uncommon, unexpected, memorable things, in which the extraordinary peeks out from behind the ordinary.
3. **Ambition**—I value essays written out of intense personal engagement with the subject matter, that seem genuinely important to the writer and not just a response to an assignment that made it clear that something was at stake in writing the essay. Such writing usually revolves around and reveals growth of some sort: self-discovery, change, or at least an awareness of the need for these things. I appreciate essays, in other words, that *push* towards understanding, that connect the author's experiences to something bigger than him or herself. But I am not looking for simple life lessons or mottos: I like essays that deal with complicated issues, which face complexity and contradiction—and do so unflinchingly. In fact, confronting difficulty often is valued more than neat resolutions, happy endings, or simplistic moralizing.
4. **Care**—finally, I value essays that show conscious and considered control over language: appropriate tone, diction, paragraphing, sentences, etc.

Assignment One: Analysis of a writing or personal context.

Your assignment is to choose one of the following and write a 750+ word essay:

Option 1*—Reading Narrative: Consider your reading process. Think about either the process as a series of moments, or you may focus on one moment that had some sort of an effect upon your ability to read. Consider how you learned to read. Write about your development as a reader. At what age? What was it like? What were some difficulties? How did you overcome these difficulties? Were there any difficulties you could not overcome?

Option 2*—Writing Narrative: How did you learn to write? Select a series of moments or a moment when you vividly remember learning to write or using writing in a moment outside of school. Reflect and consider your writing, then, and write about this writing event. You may also write about your development as a writer. How and in what context did you learn to write? Who (or group of people) taught you to write? What was frustrating? What was easy?

Option 3*—“Light Bulb Moment” Narrative: Describe a moment in your life that changed you—for better or worse. Everyone has light bulb moments in their lives—those moments when you realize your parents aren’t invincible or you are mortal (maybe after jumping off a swing and breaking your arm, like me!). Don’t try to resolve this moment, but represent its complexity to readers. What was this moment like? What did it make you realize? How much of an impact did it have on your life?

**All options require a 250-500 word reflection, to be detailed later*

Fundamental principles

1. Be able to write a coherent narrative
2. Extensive description and use of varied vocabulary
3. A demonstrated ability to reflect and examine one’s own writing

Assignment Two: Recognition of a discourse community

Your assignment is to explain and expand up the notion of a discourse community, as well as choose one (and ONLY one discourse community in which you participate), along with why you participate in it and its relationship to other discourse communities. A warning: DO NOT USE Wikipedia to understand a discourse community. It’s not nuanced enough. Essay length should be at least 1000+ words.

Fundamental principles

1. Explain a discourse community accurately
2. Choose a discourse community you participate in and explain your relationship with it
3. Compare Foucault’s notion of author with your chosen discourse community
4. Explain why you participate in your chosen discourse community (or why you don’t “choose”)
5. Explain the power relationships your discourse community has to other discourse communities
6. Learn (become “socialized”) your discourse community’s conventions and adopt them in the essay

Assignment Three: Analysis of an academic discourse community

Your assignment is to write about a chosen academic discourse community and explain why it is a discourse community. Furthermore, you are to defend and justify why you choose it. You must also identify what are discourse conventions and who are important members of the community. Essay length: 1200+ words

Fundamental principles

1. Explain a discourse community accurately
2. Explain why your chosen academic community is a discourse community
3. Identify and explain at least 5 discourse conventions in regards to EACH of the following:
 - a. Writing conventions
 - b. Style conventions

- c. Epistemological conventions
4. Find at least five different articles authored by at least five different members of that academic discourse community and argue why they should be considered in that discourse community.

Assignment Four: Researching a new idea

For this next assignment, you are to join an academic community of researchers and identify a problem in that academic community. Then you must address that problem to the best of your abilities. As such you will begin to see research as not a summary of information, but rather as response to a series of questions that have been asked by previous individuals who have investigated your topic. There are thus a series of documents you will be asked to produce. They are as follows:

- 1) Annotated Bibliography (30 pts)
 - a. This assignment asks you to research and read about a particular topic
 - b. Read and understand 5 academic essays (at least 10+ pages each)
 - c. Summarize each source in a lengthy paragraph (half a page single-spaced)
 - d. Type out five important passages FOR EACH SOURCE (with page numbers)
 - e. You should analyze the source and how it relates to your topic (half a page single spaced)
 - f. The total document should be approximately 6-8 pages (including passages)
 - g. Color code the document: yellow is summary and green is analysis (passages do not need color coding)
- 2) 5 minute ORAL in-class proposals (10 pts)
 - a. This assignment asks you to speak in front of the class; it acts as a preliminary investigation of your topic
 - b. Breakdown of the speech:
 - i. 1+ minutes on explaining your topic
 - ii. 1+ minutes on explaining the question you have identified within your topic
 - iii. 1+ minutes on explaining why the question is important
- 3) A research paper (60 pts)
 - a. This assignment asks you to create a professional and academic essay that is approximately 2,500+ words in length (about 5-8 pages, depending on formatting)
 - b. There should be sections to this essay. Those sections should include at least:
 - i. A background section. In this section, you must state the question/issue you are discussing, what other researchers have said about that issue, and other important notions that are important to the overall question/issue.
 - ii. An argument clearly divided into sections so that a reader can follow the main points of the essay. This part may contain multiple sections. The number is determined by the research topic and question.
 - iii. An exigency (formerly known as the conclusion). This concluding section wraps up the argument by stating to other researchers the importance of the argument presented in the rest of the essay.
 - iv. A coda after the exigency. The coda is distinct from the rest of the essay in that it takes the argument and pontificates on the implications of that argument.
 - c. Formal academic language, tone, and word choice must be used. You must be precise in your meaning. Do not write like you talk. Use tight language. Avoid “to be” verbs (is, was, are, have been, etc)
 - d. A cover sheet, with your name, a creative title, date, epigraph (a quote related to your essay’s argument), and an abstract (a 3-5 sentence paragraph summarizing the essay so that other researchers may determine if the essay may be of use to them)
 - e. You should use at least 5 sources, smoothly integrated, in the construction of your argument.

A less formal restatement of this assignment: We will be researching an issue that is personally meaningful to you. Research is question-based inquiry that seeks to uncover a problem or issue. It is crucial to see research as context-dependent; in other words, there is no one right way to do research, what constitutes a reliable source varies depending on the subject, and research is not summarizing but taking numerous sources and trying to problem-solve or innovate in a way that others have not. As a result of this last notion, we must realize that research requires us to enter into conversations with various sources people. This discussion was going on before you joined it and it will continue after you stop researching. In this way, research is less about a paper and more about the process...the adventure if you will.

In other words, you can inquire into ANY topic and become, as best as you can, an expert in that subject. You must go to the library. You must go on an adventure. You will enjoy yourself. You will get frustrated. You will get angry. You will find sources that are useful. You will find sources that are useless. But you will go on an adventure. You can interview people. You can read. You must read. You will struggle. You will succeed. You will succeed because if you are truly invested in the topic, then you will realize that research is not only fun, but rewarding. You will realize that research is not a product, but a process in which you continually revise what you know and how you know it.

Fundamental principles

1. Demonstrated proficiency of an academic discourse community
2. Demonstrated ability to research and understand the discourse community's conventions
3. Integrated personal viewpoint (NOT opinion because it's informed) with your personal research found
4. Critique of the discourse community that identifies the discourse community's
5. An *attempt* as positing a new idea

Assignment Five: Final Writing Report

Because this course focuses as much on the process of writing as it does on your final grade, I would like you to reflect on your writing process. This assignment is inordinately flexible and sits in a liminal space; it exists after the hardest assignment you've completed and is meant truly to be useful to you—in your personal, professional, and academic writing lives. It is designed to help you expand the writing process so that you do not forget all of the steps required to writing a superb text/document. FORMATTING IS UP TO YOU. Essay should be at least 1500 words but has no limit.

Fundamental principles

1. What are your best practices for writing? As they work for you?
2. You have mentioned what place and space works best for your writing
3. What works for you and what doesn't?
4. What location works best for you? Who do you write most effectively with?
5. How do you outline?
6. What strategies do you have for outlining/brainstorming/beginning a text?
7. How do you revise? What kind of revising works for you?
8. How much time does initial drafting take you? Why? How can you provide enough time for this?
9. How much time does revising take you? Why? How can you provide enough time for this?
10. How do you use writing in your personal life? Academic life? Your chosen discipline and academic discourse community? Your professional life? Your online/digital life?