

A general framework for assessing your paper

A paper

The main characteristic is rich content in service of an interesting, even surprising, argument or analysis. Its information is delivered in such a way as to make the reader feel she's been taught something significant, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. The A paper plays fair, considering counterarguments, other points of view or possibilities. The title and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are elegant; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; and the tone enhances the purposes of the paper. The conclusion doesn't merely repeat the paper's argument or analysis, it answers the "so what?" question, explaining convincingly why your argument/analysis matters. The A paper, because of its intelligent approach to the assignment, careful organization, and development, imparts a feeling of unusual clarity and intellectual stimulation.

B paper

The B paper is significantly more than competent. It offers an interesting argument or analysis and imparts substantial information and shows awareness of another point of view. Its points are logically ordered, well developed, and unified around a clear organizing principle that's apparent early in the paper. The opening paragraph draws the reader in; the conclusion explains why the paper matters; transitions between paragraphs are for the most part smooth; and the sentence structures are pleasingly varied. The diction of the B paper is typically much more concise and precise than that of the C paper. It usually has some grammar or usage errors, but nothing too distracting. In places, the B paper can be quite distinctive or memorable.

C paper

The C paper is generally competent. It meets the assignment and is reasonably well organized and developed, but its main argument or analysis may be uninteresting. The content feels a bit thin, ordinary, or conventional. Ideas are typically cast in the form of generalities that prompt the reader to pencil questions in the margin like "In every case?" "Why?" "What do you mean, exactly?" Stylistically, the C paper often has an introduction that does little to hook the reader; transitions between paragraphs that are a bit bumpy; sentences that tend to follow a predictable subject-verb-object pattern; diction that may be repetitive, redundant, or imprecise; and a conclusion that rehashes the paper. The C paper gets the job done, but needs more intellectual rigor and imagination.

D paper

The treatment and development of the subject in the D paper are still very amorphous. While you may be able to detect an organizing principle, it may not be clear or consistent. Sentences are often awkward, ambiguous, and fraught with errors of grammar and usage. The whole piece gives the impression of having been written a few hours before class.