

A Guide To Evaluating Your Own Writing

In assigning grades, instructors concentrate on the four areas of **topic, ideas, organization,** and **expression.** You can use this checklist to help you preview how an instructor might read your work—or you can ask a fellow student to “mark” your paper using it.

You don't have to assign yourself grades, although they're included if you wish to. If you do use them, use 'C' as your starting point (i.e., have the expectation that you've written an adequate paper), and move up or down from there.

1. Topic:

- is there a clear definition of what the central topic, problem or issue is? can you point to a place where it is described clearly and precisely? **A B C D E**
 - is the topic sufficiently narrowed or broadened such that it can be dealt with fully in the assigned length? **A B C D E**
 - is there a clear rationale for analysing or discussing this topic? Have you established why your topic is important, and to whom? **A B C D E**
 - is there a clear thesis or perspective on the topic?—not just “what” but “what about it?” (e.g., “incidences of bullying have increased” vs. “increasing incidences of bullying reflect the failure of social policies”)? **A B C D E**
 - does the paper stick to the topic, or does it sometimes wander to other topics? **A B C D E**
- Overall: A B C D E**

2. Ideas:

- is the content appropriate to the topic or question posed? is the level of detail appropriate for the focus of the paper (i.e., broad or narrow)? **A B C D E**
 - is there a good balance between ideas and evidence, or evidence and interpretation? **A B C D E**
 - have you understood and applied the literature and the theories, or have you merely read and regurgitated them? have you explained the ideas and findings of others in your own words? have you described their strengths and weaknesses? **A B C D E**
 - have you shown which approaches have been taken to your topic or problem? do you show awareness of problematic or controversial elements; awareness of potential objections or alternate approaches? **A B C D E**
 - are you too general, too descriptive, too full of generalizations that can't be supported? are your ideas clichéd, or repetitious? **A B C D E**
 - does the argument (ideas + evidence) made in the body connect to the topic, and does it lead logically and inevitably to your conclusion(s)? **A B C D E**
- Overall: A B C D E**

3. Organization and Structure:

- are there clearly defined sections in the paper that correspond to the particular requirements of the assignment? if headings are used, are they used logically? **A B C D E**
 - does the introduction define the issue, state a rationale, and indicate a focus for your discussion/analysis? **A B C D E**
 - does each paragraph in the body address a distinct idea, or contribute to the development of the distinct idea of its section? is there unnecessary repetition? **A B C D E**
 - does the conclusion merely restate the topic or thesis, or does it offer a genuine conclusion? **A B C D E**
 - on all levels—the paper as a whole, each section, each paragraph, and each sentence—does the paper follow the three principles of effective organization?
 - **unity** (deals with one idea)
 - **coherence** (moves smoothly and logically)
 - **emphasis** (important points and words are strategically placed) **A B C D E**
 - if there is an abstract, is it accurate, concise, self-contained, and readable? **A B C D E**
- Overall: A B C D E**

4. Expression

- is the writing style concise, direct, and interesting? **A B C D E**
 - is there a good variety of sentence lengths and types? **A B C D E**
 - is the tone appropriate?
 - scientific: neutral, objective **A B C D E**
 - reflective: personal, subjective **A B C D E**
 - are technical and scientific terms used correctly and consistently? **A B C D E**
 - are the non-technical word choices appropriate?—good, varied vocabulary; precision in word choice; clear and simple over long and Latinate **A B C D E**
 - are there errors in “mechanics”: grammar, punctuation, usage, spelling? **A B C D E**
 - are the citation, referencing and formatting complete and accurate? **A B C D E**
- Overall: A B C D E**

Final Grade

Topic	A B C D E
Ideas	A B C D E
Organization	A B C D E
Expression	A B C D E
Average	A B C D E