

SOAN 230: Essay grading criteria Swyers, Spring 2008

Every essay in this class will be graded using the same basic rubric. Please use this rubric in two ways: 1) as a guideline to write your essays, and 2) as a way of identifying weak spots in your graded papers and developing strategies for improving.

If you are unclear why you got a particular score, please come see me. If you seek assistance at the writing center, make sure you bring this rubric as well as the essay prompt.

IMPORTANT NOTE RE: CITATION: PAPERS THAT DO NOT CITE THEIR SOURCES WILL NOT BE GRADED. IF YOU ARE UNCERTAIN ABOUT CITATION, SEE ME BEFORE YOU WRITE.

1) Clear and significant thesis (worth 10 points)

This is crucial to the success of your paper. Ideally, a thesis is a single sentence (or two, if need be) that captures the heart of your argument. It is a statement sufficiently specific to prove within the confines of the paper you are writing, yet sufficiently important to give your reader incentive to care about the paper.

9-10: thesis answers prompt in innovative or surprising way

7-8: thesis answers prompt clearly

5-6: thesis links to prompt but does not make clear argument

3-4: thesis is weak or comes too late to drive the paper

1-2: unclear what thesis is, many possibilities, but none developed

0: there is no thesis

2) Organizational structure that facilitates the development of the argument (worth 10 points)

Even a very strong thesis with good evidence can be undermined if the organization of your paper makes no sense. Make sure your reader has the information they need to understand each point as you bring it up. Make sure it is clear why each point is relevant to the argument. Build your argument in a logical, step-by-step fashion.

9-10: argument makes clear points well connected to thesis and one another

7-8: argument has a shaky connection or two but connects points to thesis

5-6: argument has distinct points that link to thesis, but not one another

3-4: argument has a scattered feel and contains irrelevant points

1-2: argument is has almost no organization and is riddled with tangents

0: there is no flow or connection between parts of the essay

3) Theoretical support for your arguments (worth 10 points)

Theoretical arguments are ones that explain *why* something happened. If you want to claim that something is human nature, you must have a theory of human nature to support that claim (trust me, this is a harder one to prove than most; I suggest leaving human nature out of it). Make sure you have a theorist who can back any explanatory claims you make.

9-10: theorists well integrated and used appropriately

7-8: theorists' ideas are well chosen but links to argument are left implied

5-6: theorists are chosen well but the ideas used don't work as well as others would

3-4: theorists ideas show up but it's not clear how they support the arguments

1-2: theorists are mentioned but for no apparent reason

0: there is no use of theorists

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4) Historical/empirical support for your arguments (worth 10 points)

Is every assertion you make supported by evidence, either from your own observations, a report, or a historical source? This is vitally important, and you should make sure all your claims *can* be supported. Avoid gross generalizations or efforts to make the facts conform to your opinion; these will destroy the credibility of your argument. Also beware that personal stories are NOT empirical data.

9-10: empirical data well chosen and analyzed in support of thesis

7-8: empirical data well used as examples in support of thesis

5-6: empirical data is well chosen but connections to arguments or thesis implied rather than explicit

3-4: empirical data is unevenly chosen, with some points left unsupported or challenged by data

1-2: "empirical data" is mostly anecdote to fill space

0: there is no use of empirical data

5) Mechanical soundness (consistent citation style, few or no grammatical errors, etc.) (worth 8 points)

It goes without saying that your final paper should be free of grammatical errors and should show good attention to details like citation style. I also want to caution you all about word choices. Do NOT use a thesaurus. Make sure the words you choose mean what you think they mean. As an example, "simulated" and "stimulated" are VERY different words, as are "spurred" and "spurned." READ AFTER YOU SPELL-CHECK. I have seen some pretty embarrassing scenarios where people accepted a spell-check's recommendation without making sure it was a good one. Watch out for dangling modifiers, unclear pronouns and nonsensical sentences. WHEN IN DOUBT, USE SIMPLER LANGUAGE. Clarity makes you appear smarter than big words. Big words tend to make it look like you're trying to hide the fact that you don't know what you're talking about.

8: essay is free of grammar, usage, spelling and citation errors.

7: essay has a minor grammatical error or a typo or two, but citation and usage are error free

5-6: essay has a few errors or careless mistakes but they do not interfere dramatically with understanding, some mistakes in citation form

3-4: usage and grammar errors make sections of essay ambiguous or unclear, citation is shaky or improperly formatted

1-2: sections of essay make no sense as written, citation limited to direct quotations and inconsistent

0: so many errors that reading the essay is a struggle

6) Format (worth 2 points)

These are EASY points of a "can you follow instructions" variety. All papers should:

- Be double spaced (not 1 1/2, and with NO extra space between paragraphs)
- Be written in 12 point font
- Have 1" margins on all sides
- Have name and page number in header or footer
- Use author-date citation style
- Include works cited page(s)
- Be 1500-1800 words long (approx 5 1/2-7 pages)

NAME: _____

RUBRIC

Thesis	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
comments											
Organization	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
comments											
Theoretical Support	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
comments											
Hist/Emp Support	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
comments											
Mechanics	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0		
comments											
Format			2				1			0	
comments											
TOTAL POINTS:						GRADE:					

Translating points to grades:

A = 47-50
 A- = 45-46
 B+ = 44
 B = 41-43

B- = 40
 C+ = 39
 C = 36-38
 C- = 35

D+ = 34
 D = 31-33
 D- = 30
 F = less than 30