Expectations for Papers

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How can you do well on a paper? Follow these directions. Most are meant to help you learn: how to read course material, think about it, come up with an argument, and make it for a reader who has not been living in your brain. Others are designed to make it easier to give feedback.

I grade papers first by skimming them, then reading closely just once. I prefer to grade hard copies with a pen but do not always do this. Overall...

A is for an **argument** that shows you did course **readings**.

Minimum requirements

- One-inch margins, double-spaced text, 12-point font.

- Name, date, and a title.

- Citations with page numbers. Use any standard format. If you need help choosing, use Chicago author-date: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

- No plagiarism: https://drexel.edu/studentlife/community-standards/code-of-conduct/academic-integrity-policy.

Criteria for grade of 'A'

Paper assignments test understanding and integration of course material. A paper that deserves an 'A' will make one point, state it up front, and be structured to convey it. Here is a checklist:

- If the paper is responding to a prompt, it answers the question in that prompt.

- The title suggests (or gives!) the paper's point.

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- The thesis statement exists, gives the paper's point, and previews steps in the argument.

- Key terms are defined.

- Relevant course readings are consulted. Read these before you Google.

- Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that corresponds to a step in the argument.

- If the paper is long, section headings exist and correspond to steps in the argument.

- Everything in the paper is relevant to the argument.

Tips on writing and thinking

Well-structured papers reflect clear thinking. I strongly recommend (and sometimes require) this short piece on writing paragraphs: https://tinyurl.com/2vknbdev.[1] Note some of its advice: minimizing backward references (like "this") in topic sentences, having just one idea per paragraph, etc.

Thinking comes before writing, which may lead to more thinking, then more writing. Start your paper several days before it is due. You need time to work through your ideas, find your point, and build the paper around it.

Write for a reader who has not taken the course and/or been immersed in your thoughts. Your words might make sense when you proofread, but you may have written them too recently to judge this. Write your paper in advance, put it aside for two days, and then make it better.

Common reasons for low grades

- Not answering the question in the prompt.

- Having a title like "Final Paper."

- Ending the paper with its point, not leading with it.

- Having just a few large paragraphs.

- Citing lectures but not readings.

- Citing lots of outside sources instead of course readings.

- Not meeting the minimum requirements (see above).

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[1] Patrick Dunleavy, "How to Write Paragraphs in Research Texts (Articles, Books and PhDs)," *Medium*, March 2014, https://tinyurl.com/2vknbdev.

Further advice

- How to start thinking about what you want to write: https://www.voteguy.com/2023/09/28/tips-for-getting-started-on-papers.

- What to put into which paragraphs: https://www.voteguy.com/2023/10/24/skeleton-outline-for-a-short-student-paper.