

How to get an ‘A’ on a paper

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Fall 2018

Absolute basics

- 1- or 1.5-inch margins.
- Double-spaced text.
- 12-point font.
- Chicago author-date citations.
- Respect the word limit.
- Your name, the date, and a title.

How to get an ‘A’

1. Make and defend a thesis statement. Don’t just answer the question. Everything in your paper should support your main or “takeaway” point.
2. Engage with lectures and/or readings (course or otherwise). Don’t just quote, cite, or summarize them. Understand and think about them.
3. Focus on relevant readings (course or otherwise). Don’t cite things to increase the length of your reference list. Part of the job is figuring out what’s relevant.
4. Organize the paper to make it easy on the reader. Paragraphs should open with topic sentences, such that one could reconstruct an outline from those sentences. For more on paragraphs, see: <https://bit.ly/1AGSKva>.
5. Give compelling evidence, whether logic or examples.
6. Consider one or more potential objections, but don’t think of so many that the paper gets hard to read. Pretend that someone is likely to reject your main point. What would it take to convince that sort of person?
7. Write the way you would talk in a professional setting. Don’t overuse big words. If you do need to use one, define it.
8. Proofread. Grammar makes an impression on the reader.