SMC English Department Grading Rubric

All English instructors use this rubric for all A Level and Literature classes at SMC to ensure consistency when assigning grades to student essays.

A=Excellent

Thesis
The thesis is arguable, limited in scope, not descriptive or factual. It presents an argument, demonstrates an awareness of audience, articulates the writer’s voice, and is clearly established.

Organization
Overall, the essay has a clear skeletal structure revealing an effective introduction/thesis paragraph, body, and conclusion that are logically integrated and internally coherent. The paragraphs progress logically and are not merely a collection. The transitions between paragraphs, sentences, and ideas are logical and smooth.

Development and Analysis
An adequate exploration of counter-arguments moves the essay beyond summary/paraphrase and shows how the evidence supports the thesis. The thesis is maintained and fully explored throughout the essay. The essay employs appropriate rhetorical modes (e.g. definition, comparison/contrast) in a clear, engaged dialogue with the sources.

Research (when applicable)

The essay uses reliable and appropriate sources to reinforce the thesis or to explore counter-arguments. The borrowed information is not used in a cut-and-paste fashion or used simply as padding. The information is correctly cited in accordance with current MLA guidelines.

Sentence Level Skills/Syntax/Diction
The sentences and grammar produce an essay which is clear, fluent, graceful. The writer deploys a variety of sentence structures to enhance the total effect of the essay and uses precise language that expresses complex ideas. The prose contains no substantial errors of spelling, grammar, or format.
B=Good

Thesis/Focus

The thesis is arguable, not descriptive or factual. It features unintegrated parts, is only implied, or is inconsistently argued.

Organization

The paragraphs generally progress logically, but are either confusing in places (missing transitions) or predictable. Some paragraphs are disorganized. The overall essay has a skeletal structure revealing an introduction/thesis paragraph, body, and conclusion, but these elements are not consistently integrated or coherent.

Development and Analysis

The essay offers only some exploration of counter-arguments. It usually shows how the evidence supports the thesis, but makes inconsistent connections between the evidence and the thesis. The essay offers more summary/paraphrase/quotations than necessary. The thesis is supported, but it disappears in places. The essay employs appropriate rhetorical modes (e.g. definition, comparison/contrast) in a dialogue with the sources, but in limited ways.

Research (when applicable)

The essay generally uses reliable and appropriate sources to reinforce the thesis, or to explore counter-arguments, but occasionally uses them in a cut-and-paste fashion, as an affirmation of the writer’s viewpoint, or simply as padding. The information is correctly cited in accordance with current MLA guidelines.

Sentence Level Skills/Syntax/Diction

The essay contains sentences that are clear but lack complexity, and demonstrates some variety in sentence structure, but may do so clumsily. Pretentious diction or imprecise language weighs the essay down. Minor errors in spelling, grammar, or format occur.
C=Adequate

An essay that otherwise might receive an "A" or "B" may receive a "C" if sentence level or research errors seriously interfere with the meaning or weaken the main argument.

Thesis/Focus
The essay has a central idea that is trite, trivial, general, or vague. The essay is predominantly descriptive, and the thesis disappears in places.

Organization
The organization of the paragraphs is apparent but not consistent and may be confusing (big jumps, missing links) or contains transitions that are missing, weak, or illogical. The organization is very predictable or rigid (echoing the “five-paragraph theme”). The introduction and/or conclusion are vague or weak and do not effectively lead the reader to the thesis or leave the reader with a coherent impression. The relation between the body of the essay and the introduction and conclusion is weak or unclear.

Development and Analysis
The essay possesses limited knowledge of the subject and little substance. The essay offers mere summary or misreading of the prompt or the borrowed material and employs disorganized paragraphs (usually skimpy), often headed with descriptive (rather than argumentative) topic sentences. The essay does not consistently employ appropriate rhetorical modes in a clear dialogue with the sources.

Research (when applicable)
The research lacks depth in relation to the topic (e.g. uses questionable or uninformative sources). The essay poorly incorporates sources (plopped in or used as filler) and/or does not document them accurately according to the MLA format.

Sentence Level Skills/Syntax/Diction
The essay contains sentences, which, though clear, are simplistic and lack variety. The diction is
wordy, imprecise, and/or awkward. The essay contains numerous spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

D=Inadequate

Thesis/Focus
The essay lacks a central idea, or presents one that is so vague as to be non-existent.

Organization
The essay lacks important elements of structure (e.g. introduction or conclusion), presents sentences and/or paragraphs non-sequentially or randomly, and lacks transitions.

Development and Analysis
The essay contains a confused discussion of the subject, whether in summary or analysis. It lacks unified, coherent, or complete paragraphs, and it fails to sustain a dialogue with the sources.

Research
The essay presents questionable sources, does not integrate sources, and presents research that is not relevant to the thesis. It fails to follow the MLA guidelines for citation.

Sentence Level Skills/Syntax/Diction
The sentences lack clarity, correctness, and variety. They contain serious errors in punctuation, spelling, diction, and syntax.

F=Incompetent

Thesis/Focus
The essay lacks a thesis. The writer is blissfully unaware of the assignment.

Organization
The organization is random or non-existent.

Development and Analysis
There is no development, or the ideas are developed with irrelevance. The development and analysis are inappropriate, simplistic, and/or incoherent. The essay lacks clarity. There is no sense of paragraphing.

**Research (when applicable)**
The essay fails to include sources for the topic and demonstrates little to no effort to integrate sources. It may include plagiarism.

**Sentence Level Skills/Syntax/Diction**
The sentences contains serious problems with grammar, syntax, diction and spelling that make the essay incomprehensible.