

### How I Assign Letter Grades<sup>1</sup>

In grading “thesis papers,” I ask myself the following set of questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Does the thesis address itself to an appropriate question or topic?
3. Is that paper free from long stretches of quotations and summaries that exist only for their own sakes and remain unanalyzed?
4. Can the writer produce complete sentences?
5. Is the material in the body of the paper “on topic?”
6. Is that paper free from basic grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors?
7. Was the page requirement met?

If the answer to ANY of these questions is “no,” the paper has earned some kind of ‘C.’ If the answer to most of these questions is “no,” its grade will be even lower.

For papers that have emerged unscathed thus far, I add the following questions.

8. How thoughtful is the paper?
9. How adequate is the thesis? Does it respond to its topic in a full and interesting way? Is it specific? Does it have an appropriate degree of complexity or is it trivial?
10. How logical and well-organized is the paper? Does it stick to the point? Does every paragraph contain a clear topic sentence? If not, is some other kind of organizing principle at work? Are the transitions well made? Does it have a real conclusion, not simply a stopping place?
11. Is the style efficient, not wordy, flowery, or unclear?
12. Does the paper have a sufficient number of examples or other sources of support?
13. Is the quality of the support sufficient/compelling?

Depending on my answers to these questions, the paper has earned some kind of ‘A’ or ‘B.’

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Bean, J.C. (1996). Engaging Ideas. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.