

How I Assign Letter Grades

I first ask myself the following questions:

1. Has the writer stated a thesis/main claim?
2. Does the thesis address itself to an appropriate question or topic?
3. Has the writer used evidence as support for analysis, or are there long stretches of quotation or other evidence left unanalyzed?
4. Has the writer used complete sentences and avoided grammatical errors?

If the answer to any of these is “no,” I give the paper some kind of C.

If the answer to most of the questions is “no,” the grade will be lower.

For papers that emerge unscathed, I add the following questions:

5. How thoughtful is the paper? Does it show originality of thinking?
6. How adequate is the thesis/main claim? Does it respond to the question in a full and interesting way? Does it have an appropriate degree of complexity?
7. How well organized is the paper? Does it stick to the point? Does every paragraph contain a clear topic sentence? If not, is another kind of organizing principle used? Are needed transitions present? Does the paper have a real conclusion, not simply a stopping place?
8. Is the writing efficient, not wordy or unclear?
9. Is the writing elegant?
10. Do I hear a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice speak as I read the paper?

Depending on my answers to such questions, I give the paper some kind of A or B.

Shaw, Harry. “Responding to Student Essays.” F.V.Bogel and K.Gottschalk (eds.). *Teaching Prose: A Guide for Writing Instructors*. New York: Norton. 1984. Print.