

Essay writing guidelines

| | Pass (Excellent) | Pass (Good) | Pass (satisfactory) | Fail |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Overall Impression | Author directly addresses main question or issue and adds new insight to the subject which was NOT provided in class or the readings. The author has retained nearly all of the knowledge presented in class. One is able to synthesize this knowledge in new ways and relate to material not covered in the course. | Author competently addresses main question/issue but does not add much new insight into the subject. The author clearly learned a lot and is able to communicate the knowledge to others. | Author attempts to address main question/issue but fails. The author has retained some information from the course/readings/own research but does not fully understand its meaning/context and cannot clearly convey it to others. | Essay does NOT address main question/issue, and it is obvious that author has not retained any significant information from the course/his research |
| Argument | Essay contains a clear argument—the reader can easily follow the authors’ train of thought and line of argumentation. | An argument is present, but reader must reconstruct it from the text. | Author attempts to make an argument (e.g., starts with a question/anecdote that is never put into context) but fails. | No attempt is made to articulate an argument. |
| Evidence and Counter-Evidence | Provides compelling and accurate evidence that convinces reader to accept main argument. The importance/relevance of all pieces of evidence is clearly stated. There are no gaps in reasoning—i.e., the reader does not need to assume anything or do additional research to accept main argument. The author considers the evidence, or alternate interpretations of evidence, that could be used to refute or weaken his/her argument, and thoughtfully responds to it. | Provides necessary evidence to convince readers of most aspects of the main arguments. The importance/relevance of some evidence presented may not be totally clear to the reader without additional research. Author acknowledges that counter-evidence/alternative interpretations exists and lists them but does not effectively explain why the argument still stands. | Not enough evidence is provided to support author’s argument/evidence is incomplete, incorrect, or oversimplified. Information from lectures. Readings/additional sources is not effectively used. Author acknowledges some of the most obvious counter-evidence and alternative explanations but a comprehensive discussing is missing. There is little or no attempt made to respond to them. | Either no evidence is provided, or there are numerous factual mistakes, omissions or oversimplifications. There is little or no mention of information from lectures and readings. No acknowledgement of counter-evidence or alternative interpretations. |
| Sources and citing | Evidence is used from a wide range of sources (e.g. lectures, readings). Author also consults scholarly books, websites, journal articles, etc. not discussed in class. All evidence is properly cited in | Evidence is used from many sources, but author relies heavily on a more limited set of sources. If outside sources are used they are 1 primarily/non-scholarly (intended for | Does not use extensive sources (other than those provided in class/syllabus). Some pieces are unreferenced or inaccurately referenced, | Only minimally uses new sources/relies exclusively on non-scholarly outside sources. No attempt is made to cite evidence. |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| | footnotes or endnotes. | a general audience) and/or web-based. All evidence is cited in footnotes or endnotes, but there are some minor problems with completeness/format of some citations. | and there are problems with completeness and format of citations. | |
| Organization | Essay contains an intro, main body and a conclusion. Introduction lays out main argument and gives an outline of what the reader can expect in the essay. The conclusion brings everything together, acknowledges potential shortcomings of the paper, and gives the reader a sense of what further work might be done to advance the subject matter described in the paper. | Essay contains an intro, main body, and a conclusion. The introduction lays out the main argument but gives the reader little idea of what to expect in the essay. The conclusion summarizes the main argument and evidence but does not move beyond what has already been presented in the paper. | Essay contains an intro, main body, and a conclusion. The introduction gives the reader an idea of what to expect in the paper but does not effectively lay out the main argument. It may begin with a set of rhetorical questions, or an anecdote that is never fully explained. The conclusion does little more than restate the introduction. Intro and/or conclusion may be too wordy or short. | Essay has no clear organizational pattern. |
| Clarity and Style | All sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. Technical terms and foreign words are always explained. All information is accurate and up-to-date. Paper has been spell-checked AND proofread and contains no errors. | All Sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. The occasional word is misused. Technical terms and foreign words are usually, but not always, explained. All information is accurate and up-to-date. Paper has been spell-checked AND proofread, and contains no more than a few minor errors, which do not adversely affect the reader's ability to understand the essay. | A few sentences are grammatically incorrect or not clearly written. Several words are misused. Technical terms and foreign words are rarely explained. Not all information is accurate and up-to-date. Paper has been spell-checked AND proofread, but still contains several errors. Reader's ability to understand essay may be compromised by these errors. | Paper is full of grammatical errors and bad writing. Several words are misused. Technical terms and foreign words are rarely explained. Some info is not accurate/up-to-date. Paper has not been spell-checked/proofread, and contains numerous errors. Reader has a difficult time understanding essay because of errors. |