

Criteria and Evaluation Scales for Assessing Student Research Essays

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- 1) Textual Genres & Conventions (for examples, see: <http://tinyurl.com/3jy5fl>)
 - A-Range:** Demonstrates proficiency in identifying literary and rhetorical terms and conventions and correctly employing them in argumentation.
 - B-Range:** Is able to identify literary and rhetorical terms and conventions but does not consistently employ them in analysis or argument.
 - C/D/F-Range:** Does not demonstrate familiarity with literary and rhetorical terms and conventions.
- 2) Application of Theory
 - A-Range:** Contains evidence of familiarity with theoretical frameworks, and can name a theoretical or scholarly lineage for the apparatus of the argument. Uses these theoretical constructs to support an argument.
 - B-Range:** Demonstrates some ability to identify a theoretical framework, but may not apply it consistently or effectively.
 - C/D/F-Range:** Does not demonstrate familiarity with theoretical frameworks or the purpose of theory for textual analysis.
- 3) Use of Research
 - A-Range:** Uses outside sources appropriate in quantity and quality to the writer's purposes. Research may be introduced to provide background historical or scholarly context that substantiates the writer's conclusions. Sources are summarized responsibly, cited correctly, and incorporated into the essay without breaking the thread of the writer's argument.
 - B-Range:** Uses outside sources and demonstrates some understanding of research, but does not employ research effectively or persuasively.
 - C/D/F-Range:** Does not use sources to support the writer's own analysis, or completely misrepresents outside research.

4) Close Reading

A-Range:

Undertakes a close reading that uses relevant passages from the text under consideration to exemplify, clarify, or advance the writer's argument.

B-Range:

Shows some awareness of the idea of close reading, but may not directly quote the text, may not employ this technique effectively, or may make obvious errors.

C/D/F-Range:

Does not mention specifics about text at all or speaks only in generalities.

5) Formulate and Advance a Thesis

A-Range:

Demonstrates an ability to formulate a thesis about a topic and to advance that thesis with appropriate and effective evidence and reasoning. A clear central point controls the entire paper and is sufficiently limited to be manageable given the length of the paper. The paper's major ideas are sufficiently developed through concrete, specific, and logical details.

B-Range:

A central point may be evident, but it does not consistently control the paper. The paper contains occasional digressions or irrelevancies. Major ideas may be reasonably well developed, but with an occasional gap in support or flaw in logic.

C/D/F-Range:

There is no discernable central point; the content may be too broad given the length of the paper, or the point is simply not clear. Ideas are merely repeated (not developed), or supporting evidence is weak, sparse, or difficult to understand. Generalities and abstractions are used when more concrete and specific evidence is needed. As a whole, the paper seems to lack a meaningful purpose for readers, and may be confusing.

6) Style

A-Range:

Clearly understands the conventions of the formal academic essay and uses them in ways appropriate to the task. The writing is sufficiently objective, evaluative, and analytical, yet demonstrates the author's engagement with, and enthusiasm for, the topic. A few minor mechanical or structural errors might appear, but on the whole the paper adheres to accepted conventions for mechanical and stylistic matters.

B-Range:

There are few violations in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Although sentences usually do not contain errors, there are occasional errors, especially in complicated sentences.

The essay slips into informal or colloquial prose and inconsistently adheres to conventions of formal academic style.

C/D/F-Range: Errors interfere with the credibility of the writer or the meaning of the text. There are errors of diction, grammar, or punctuation even in simple sentences, and the meaning of some sentences is not clear because of errors. The writer seems unaware of, or does not adhere to, the stylistic conventions of formal academic prose.

Overall Effectiveness

A-Range: The essay is likely to persuade readers or be viewed as particularly reasonable, clear, original, or credible—even if they are not fully persuaded.

B-Range: The essay does not distinguish itself as being effective or ineffective. Some readers may be persuaded to accept certain parts of the writer’s position, but on the whole, the essay is not likely to have a noticeable impact one way or the other.

C/D/F-Range: The essay is particularly unlikely to achieve its goal. Readers are likely to be unconvinced, confused, or even exasperated.