

**EXPECTATIONS**  
  
for  
  
**FORMAL WRITTEN WORK**  
  
in  
  
**COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSES**

**Standards for Formal Written Work  
For Students at Del Mar College**

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In the academic world, as in the world at large, readers will judge your written work primarily on the basis of its content: that is, on the quality of the information and opinions it contains. However, the careful organization and the clear, concise expression of that content are essential if your readers are to grasp your full meaning. The faculty will, therefore, evaluate the organization and expression of your written assignments along with the content. Grammar, mechanics, and appearance will also be considered because problems in these areas can interfere with readers' comprehension of your work or even prevent them from giving it their serious attention.

Individual instructors may add their own requirements to the statements in this document. Each instructor will decide how the various elements will influence grading in a particular course.

**Writing and Thinking**

You should be able to perform with college-level competence the mental operations on which written work depends. These include

- **Generalization (abstracting):** Finding the common element that relates particular examples or instances to each other

- Inference (reading between the lines): Drawing out meanings that are implied but not stated explicitly
- Analysis: Examining parts of the whole, such as causes, effects, and processes
- Syntheses (creating): Shaping ideas into new relationships
- Evaluation: Making judgments according to criteria.

You should be able to apply to new situations the knowledge you have gained from your classes, your reading, and your investigations.

You should be able to draw your own conclusions rather than simply to restate or summarize the ideas of others.

You should be able to state a thesis clearly and support it with reasoning and evidence.

You should be able to organize the parts of a paper in an orderly sequence, governed by a controlling purpose that is clear to the reader. Paragraphs and subsections should also have their own internal order.

You should be able to adapt what you write to the needs and expectations of your intended audience, whether it is your peers, your teacher, other scholars in a discipline, or the general public.

### **The Writing Process**

Successful writing is seldom merely the recording of the writer's first thoughts. More often it is the result of a process involving several stages. You should know how to use strategies that will help you to

- Choose and limit a topic
- Collect information
- Develop ideas
- Produce rough and polished drafts
- Revise and edit
- Proofread

### **Standard English, Grammar, Style**

Your papers should be written in formal standard English and should be free of nonstandard constructions (such as "a lot," "should of," "use to") and of informal usage (such as "The experiment went O.K.>").

Your sentence structure should be free of major grammatical problems such as fused sentences, sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreement, inconsistent verb tenses, unclear pronoun references, and misplaced modifiers.

Your sentences should be clear, concise, and varied, showing capable use of the tools necessary for a mature writing style, such as coordination, subordination, parallelism, and transitional words and phrases.

Your choice of words should be precise and appropriate for your subject. You may sometimes find it essential to use technical terms, but you should always avoid unnecessary jargon.

### **Mechanics and Appearance**

Your papers should contain no errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or typing. You should show careful attention to matters of appearance, including legibility, neat corrections, and suitable presentation. The use of a word processor is expected by most teachers. If your instructor does not specify how you are to present your paper, you may follow these recommendations:

- On the first page of the essay, include the following:
  - Your name
  - Instructor's name
  - Course title and section number
  - Date
  - Title of the paper
- Make the margins one inch all around
- Put your last name and the page number on every page in the header field
- Use standard 8 ½ x 11 inch paper, white, medium weight
- Use a standard, size 12 font
- Double space
- If necessary on your final draft, make corrections neatly. Use an eraser or correction tape/fluid.

### **Library Research and Documentation**

You should be able to find and use materials published in various forms, including books, periodicals, newspapers, government documents, abstracts, microforms, recordings, and electronic media.

You should be able to summarize or paraphrase the written work of others. Paraphrased material must be completely restated in your own words and should blend smoothly into your style.

You should be able to identify your source material according to the method your instructor requires.

Data or distinctive ideas taken from sources **must** be identified by textual citations even if those ideas are not quoted directly. A direct quotation **must** be identified by a citation as well as by quotation marks or block indentation.

## College-Level Grading Standards

**The A Paper.** A paper that receives an *A* is an outstanding paper that makes a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. Perhaps the principal characteristic of the *A* paper is its rich content. Some describe that content as “dense,” others as “packed,” because the information delivered is such that one feels significantly taught by the author. The *A* paper is also marked by stylistic fitness: the title and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are artful; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; the tone enhances the purpose of the paper. Finally, the *A* paper, because of its careful organization and development, imparts a feeling of wholeness and unusual clarity. It is not marred by errors of grammar, punctuation, or spelling, nor is it hindered by weak sentence structure. The writing is smooth, vigorous, fresh. The *A* paper is also neat in appearance.

**The B Paper.** A *B* paper fulfills the assignment but goes beyond a routine response and shows evidence of thought and planning that makes it significantly better than competent. The *B* paper delivers substantial information; its specific points are logically ordered, well-developed, and unified around a clear organizing principle that is apparent early in the paper. The opening paragraph draws the reader in, the supporting paragraphs are convincing, and the sentence structure is correct, if not original. Finally, the paper contains no major distracting grammatical errors. It is neat in appearance.

**The C Paper.** A *C* paper carries out the assignment in a routine but adequate way, makes a commitment to the topic, and provides at least a satisfactory response to it. The paper demonstrates clear and logical organization, though perhaps not consistently or completely. The introduction, body, or conclusion may not be well-developed. The actual information usually seems thin and common-place. One reason for this impression is that ideas are typically cast in the form of vague generalities. The *C* paper often fails to demonstrate maturity of thought, depth of development, or sufficient attention to organization. The transitions between paragraphs are logical but often unimaginative; the sentences, besides being a bit choppy, tend to follow a predictable (hence monotonous) subject-verb-object pattern, and diction is occasionally marred by unconscious repetition, redundancy, or imprecision. The paper contains only occasional mistakes in grammar, usage, and mechanics. It is easily read and neat in appearance.

**The D Paper.** A *D* paper is weak and inadequate. Its content relates to the assignment but normally does not clarify a purpose or support a commitment to the topic. Its treatment and development of the subject are not only rudimentary but also needlessly repetitious. While some organization may be present, it is neither clear nor effective. Sentences are frequently awkward, ambiguous, and marred by grammatical errors. Evidence of careful proofreading is scanty, and the phrasing makes it difficult for the reader to understand the content. Words are often misused, and sentences fail to conform to conventions of edited American English. The paper is characterized by awkwardness throughout. It gives the reader the impression that the writer lacks adequate control or assurance; the reader has to work to understand what the writer intends. The overall lack of control in the *D* paper reveals writing that has missed the mark. The visual presentation often needs improvement.

**The F Paper.** An *F* paper is poorly constructed, carelessly written, and marred by grammatical errors so that the reader cannot follow the ideas easily. Some errors indicate a failure to understand the basic grammar of sentences. In short, the ideas, organization, style, and presentation fall far below what is acceptable in college writing. The information is inadequate. The paper lacks specific illustrations or examples or belabors the obvious. The paper lacks organization. It may make some sense but only when the reader struggles to find the sense. Most sentences are faulty, either too short and choppy or too long and ill-constructed. Word choices are poor. Usually, there are multiple grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. The visual appearance is often sloppy.

A plagiarized paper falls into the category of the *F* paper, and so does a stylistically adequate paper that does not adhere to the assignment.

Note: The D and F differ only in degree. Neither can be regarded as successful.

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