

The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning

Grading Rubrics for Research Papers

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A

- Thesis is well developed and clearly focused
- Supporting evidence is thorough and relevant
- Narrative and description kept to minimum needed for analysis
- Conflicting evidence is consistently acknowledged and accounted for
- Counter-arguments are consistently anticipated and refuted
- Conclusion emerges logically from main arguments
- Footnotes are used when needed; footnotes and bibliography use consistent and appropriate format
- Well organized and well written

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B

- Thesis is well developed, but may not be as clearly focused as in top category
- Supporting evidence is less thorough and/or relevant than in top category, but is still substantial
- A little too much narrative or description
- Conflicting evidence is usually acknowledged and accounted for
- Counter-arguments are usually anticipated and refuted
- Conclusion is logical extension of the rest of the essay, but may be somewhat attenuated
- Footnotes are used when needed; footnotes and bibliography use consistent and appropriate format
- Well organized and clearly, if not elegantly, written

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C

- Thesis is adequate, but may need further explication or definition
- Supporting evidence is adequate but somewhat sketchy, or its relevance is not always made clear
- Too much narrative or description, at expense of analysis
- Relatively little concern for conflicting evidence
- Relatively little concern for counter-arguments, or they are not dealt with successfully
- Conclusion “goes through the motions”
- Footnotes are not always used when needed; footnotes and bibliography may sometimes be in inappropriate format
- Adequate organization and style, but may contain enough structural flaws or mechanical errors to distract from the presentation

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NC

- Thesis is unclear or even missing

- Supporting evidence is irrelevant or missing; essay relies on assertion rather than demonstration
- Narrative or description far outweigh analysis
- No real concern for conflicting evidence
- Does not reveal awareness of counter-arguments
- Conclusion “goes through the motions” or is missing
- Footnotes and bibliography are sloppy or missing
- Sloppy organization, mechanics, style

Suggestions to Keep Your Research Paper from Being Stylistically Challenged

1. Have an attention-getting title. Just calling it “Research Paper” or something bland like “Intercollegiate Athletics” or “College Admissions” does not send chills of anticipation up and down the prospective reader’s spine. The title should be interesting and give some indication of what the viewpoint or thesis of the paper will be.
2. Number the pages. This will help you avoid the embarrassment that occurs when unnumbered pages accidentally reshuffle themselves when, say, dropped on the floor--and the reader can’t tell the difference. Yes, this has actually happened.
3. Place footnotes at the end (as “endnotes”), not at the bottom of each page where they appear. Place the bibliography after the endnotes. The pages devoted to endnotes and bibliography do not count toward the total number of pages specified for the paper. A 15-20 page paper is to include 15-20 pages of YOUR writing.
4. When quoting, indicate in the text whom it is that you are quoting, give some indication when introducing the quotation of why you are introducing it, and use your own words after the quotation to indicate what you want to reader to make of it. The importance of quotations is not self-evident or self-explanatory. Avoid having too many large, block quotations. Remember, this paper is supposed to present your thinking, not to demonstrate your ability to mine the thinking of others. (And, by the way, “quote” is a verb, not a noun. The noun is “quotation.”)

Now, a few more stylistic pointers (thanks to N.Y. Times columnist William Safire):

“The Fumblerules”

1. The passive voice should never be used.
2. Don’t use contractions in formal writing.
3. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
4. Watch out for colloquial verbs which have cropped up or snuck into our language.
5. About sentence fragments. No incomplete sentences.
6. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
7. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
8. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
9. Be sure each pronoun agrees with their antecedent.
10. If you reread your work you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
11. A writer must not shift your point of view.
12. A good writer of clear English who writes well for clarity to communicate ideas of great importance avoids the stringing of too many prepositional phrases together.
13. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration.
14. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
15. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixed metaphors.
16. Reserve the apostrophe for it’s proper use and omit it when its not necessary.
17. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn’t.
18. Last but not least, avoid cliches like the plague.