**Letter Grades on Writing Assignments** (Based on guidelines from Prof. Jim Davis)

An “**A**” signifies that all of the rhetorical, grammatical, and stylistic features of the writing demonstrate a nearly professional polish and work together to advance a clear, interesting, persuasive, and significant analytic argument.  The writing evidences superior skill in *understanding* the source (text/video/audio/lecture/performance/discussion) *and interpreting it*, not merely offering opinions about it.  The ideas are organized in a sequence that reinforces the logic of the thesis, and they are illustrated and supported by well-chosen and coherently integrated details from the source.  Such an essay demonstrates the writer’s awareness of the readers’ needs.  It doesn’t waste their time with filler, irrelevant material, or needlessly wordy phrasing.  Nor does it neglect to explain complex ideas and to enable the readers to experience them with powerful detail and textual support.  An “A” essay is unified, coherent, focused, developed, precisely phrased, insightful, novel, persuasive, and stylistically effective.

A “**B**” signifies that the writing shows much promise, that with some careful revising and further development (not just editing) it might have the potential to earn an “A.”  Between adequate and excellent, a “B” essay offers and supports intelligent arguments that unify and shape the subsequent paragraphs.  The "B" paper does not display the high level of close reading and originality of thought of the "A" paper.  It may contain several minor problems in logic and interpretation, such as occasional lack of sufficient analysis/synthesis.  But it will show evident care, persuasive analysis/synthesis, and facility with grammatical skills.  It may lack the fresh insight or the impressive power of phrasing that is evident in an “A” paper, but it shows thought and planning as it advances an important interpretive argument.

A “**C**” indicates that an essay meets the minimal requirements of an assignment.  It makes an argument though it might be obvious and commonplace.  The essay presents evidence to support its claims but has not always made their relevance clear to the reader.  The "C" paper may contain too much summary of the text without sufficient analysis of it.  Its argument may contain illogical conclusions or problems in interpretation caused by misreading.  A “C” paper does not demonstrate the grammatical control that produces emphatic and clear phrasing.  There are likely to be grammatical errors—though not so frequent that they distract the reader from the ideas being discussed.

A “**D**” paper might show effort and insight but it lacks the basic features that facilitate the readers’ comprehension. These features may include such things as unity, clear focus, grammatical control, clear and purposeful organization, audience awareness, sufficiency of supporting detail and evidence.  A “D” paper might be in an early phase of drafting.  It might wander from its key idea into irrelevant ideas or to things that were added merely to reach a target length.  It might offer ideas that don’t go beyond the familiar and that use overly general phrasing and clichés without showing successful engagement with complex ideas.

A paper might fail if it’s extremely difficult to read, if it doesn’t have an idea that connects its parts, if it doesn’t offer evidence for its claims, if it’s merely summary and not argument, if it doesn’t fulfill the assignment, if ideas are not grouped into paragraphs, or if persistent grammatical errors draw the readers’ attention away from the topic.  An essay might also fail if phrases or ideas have been used without proper acknowledgement from a source (*plagiarism*).