Analytical Terms For Use In Diagnosis, Response, & Evaluation

In order to explain both the strengths of your papers as well as what you may do to improve your writing, it is helpful to have a concise set of analytical or descriptive terms that can be used to discuss important dimensions of a text. With time, all writers develop a vocabulary suited to this purpose, and the six terms described below are not offered as being unique or original—they are likely to be synonyms for terms you may already use to discuss writing. However, these terms reflect most of the qualities defined in the Writing Program grading standards. They can therefore serve both as a common vocabulary relating the diagnosis of texts to an explanatory response and as a basis for evaluation. **These terms describe important characteristics of all university-level writing.**

COGENCY (Argumentative Force or Analytical Insight)

The insight and vitality of the concepts underlying the paper's argument or analysis.

Strong: Paper's argument or analysis is insightful, vigorous, and potentially compelling.

Acceptable: Paper's argument or analysis is plausible, clear, and consistent.

Weak: Paper's argument or analysis is implausible, unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent.

SUPPORT

The extent to which the paper's assertions are supported with examples, evidence, or reasoning that are appropriate for the intended audience.

Strong: The paper's argument or analysis receives judicious, full, and convincing support.

Acceptable: The argument or analysis receives credible support.

Weak: The argument or analysis receives inadequate, unconvincing, or irrelevant support.

CONTROL

The organizational quality of the paper, both in terms of its overall structure and of its individual paragraphs.

Strong: The paper is well structured; its form at all levels contributes to its purpose.

Acceptable: The paper is generally well-structured, with few flaws in its overall organization or its paragraphing.

Weak: The paper is poorly structured; organizational flaws undermine its effectiveness.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE(S)

The extent to which the paper explores the issue(s) set forth in the assignment and addresses all aspects of the writing task.

Strong: The paper addresses the assignment in depth, thoroughly exploring the complexities of the issue(s).

Acceptable: The paper addresses the assignment and recognizes the complexities of the issue(s).

Weak: The paper treats the assignment in a superficial, simplistic, or disjointed manner.

STYLE

The effectiveness of the paper's sentence structure, word choice, fluency, and tone in terms of its purpose and intended audience.

Strong: The sentence structure, word choice, fluency, and tone of the paper enhance its effectiveness and reinforce its purpose.

Acceptable: The sentence structure, word choice, fluency, and tone of the paper contribute to its effectiveness and adequately support its purpose.

Weak: The sentence structure, word choice, fluency, and tone of the paper detract from its effectiveness or are inappropriate to its purpose.

GRAMMAR & MECHANICS

The quality of the paper at the surface level: syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and format.

Strong: The paper is nearly impeccable in its syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and format.

Acceptable: Sentence-level errors do not seriously detract from the paper's effectiveness.

Weak: Sentence-level errors are so frequent and disruptive as to detract from the paper's effectiveness.

Writing Program General Evaluation Rubric

The following rubric outlines the general criteria used to assign grades in Writing Program courses. The + and – grades allow instructors to make finer qualitative distinctions concerning their students' ability at each grade point; A+ and F- are not recognized by the University.

In general, thoughtful, critical essays are rewarded. Those which demonstrate overall organizational and argumentative/analytical skills will usually be rewarded over those which merely demonstrate sentence-level competence. Those which fail to respond to all aspects of the assignment will usually not receive a passing grade.

In evaluating an essay, the reader will first make a **C/D** decision. After having made this initial judgment, the reader then decides whether essays falling above this cut deserve to be raised beyond the **C** range to the **B** or **A** level, and whether essays falling below this cut should be lowered from the **D** range to **F**.

The C/D Distinction

C WRITING ***will***:

Offer a competent if occasionally limited argument/analysis in a direct response to the assignment topic. The argument or analysis is plausible, clear, and generally consistent.

Use appropriate examples and reasoning to support the overall argument/analysis. The argument or analysis receives credible support; the author includes enough material or detail to support what he or she is trying to do. When used, sources are reasonably well subordinated to the author's purpose.

Display competence in overall organization, paragraph development, and logical transition, even if it occasionally exhibits organizational or argumentative/analytical weaknesses. The author demonstrates structural control (the readers know where they're being taken and why).

Address the issue(s) set forth in the assignment. The paper responds to the writing task and recognizes the complexities of the issue(s) raised in the assignment. The author does not just go through the motions, but cares about his or her subject and its impact on the reader.

Use a style and tone appropriate to the purpose. The language used supports the author's purpose and is appropriate within the academic community.

Display competence in sentence variety, grammar, spelling, and usage. Occasional surface errors don't seriously detract from the paper's purpose or significantly interfere with the reader's comprehension of the essay.

D WRITING ***will offer a limited argument/analysis in response to the assignment, marked by several of the following weaknesses:.***

An implausible, unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent argument or analysis. The paper lacks the cogency and purpose necessary for competent college-level writing; the paper fails to exhibit careful thinking.

Inadequate, unconvincing, irrelevant, or derivative support. The paper accumulates (often paragraph by paragraph) derivative and/or anecdotal examples without integrating them into a focused argument/analysis. The author relies on inappropriate—or weak—examples or reasoning to support the overall discussion. If sources are used, the author may piece together writing from secondary sources without using it in the service of his or her own argument or point of view. Alternatively, the author may not include enough material or detail to support the purpose of the paper.

Flaws in organization, paragraph development, or logical transition. The paper lacks structural fluency: organizational flaws cause a lack of overall coherence, undermining the paper's purpose. The reader is too often puzzled by the course the paper takes, or the paper relies too exclusively on formulaic organization, thereby becoming stilted and predictable.

Failure to seriously or thoughtfully address the issue(s) set forth in the assignment. The paper treats the issue(s) simplistically; the argument/analysis generally overlooks the complexity of the issue(s) raised. The author doesn't care enough about the subject or the reader's expectations, and may fail to respond to all aspects of the writing task.

An inappropriate style or tone. The style and tone detract from the purpose and are inappropriate in terms of the academic discourse community.

Flaws in syntax, grammar, usage, or spelling. Mechanical errors detract from the paper's purpose or interfere with the reader's comprehension. Significant problems in wording or syntax make the writing unclear or confusing.