Essay Rubric

Unless otherwise specified in your course syllabus or additional information, essays will be graded according to the following rubric:

- (50%) Argument
    - Introduction: Does the introduction show the essay's significance? Does it logically build up to the thesis? Does the thesis make a clear, definite assertion about the essay's topic? Does the thesis make a distinctive or original contribution to contemporary scholarly discussion about the topic?
    - Body: Does the argument coherently demonstrate the thesis? Does the argument try to demonstrate the thesis too broadly for the essay's assigned length?
    - Conclusion: Without mechanically repeating, does the conclusion echo the preceding argument and the essay's overall thesis? Does the conclusion provide the audience a sense of closure to the essay's argument?
- (25%) Bibliographic interaction
    - Does the essay use the required number of scholarly sources?
    - Does the essay use and cite the scholarly sources appropriate to its argument in appropriate places and ways in that argument?
    - Does the essay only summarize and report on its sources? Or does it critically interact with them?
    - Does the essay show careful interaction with scholarship that disagrees with one or more of the essay's contentions?
- (25%) Formatting, mechanics, and style
    - Does the essay's prose read smoothly?
    - Is the essay free of typographical errors?
    - Does the essay properly implement the appropriate style manual?
    - Does the essay avoid repeating errors noted in markup on prior assignments?[1]
    - Is the essay submitted in the proper file format (i.e., a DOCX file)?
- Lateness: -0–100% according to this policy
- Length: -0–100% according to this policy and the length specified in the essay's instructions

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[1] Not infrequently, there may be situations where you receive graded feedback on a Monday with the following assignment due Tuesday of that same week. In such cases, I do not expect that you will necessarily have had the opportunity to thoroughly work through my feedback before making that submission. This criterion then would primarily apply to the submission after that one. The aim isn't to be pedantic but, over time, to encourage you to intentionally improve your writing by using the feedback I provide on it.

Mark type	Argument	Bibliography	Mechanics
Excellent or superior (A) *Exceeds expectations and, for PhD students, is essentially publishable.*	Makes a distinctive contribution to the discussion of the subject appropriate to the nature of the assignment. Demonstrates exceptional mastery of the subject. Critically analyzes, synthesizes, and applies relevant concepts. Elaborates on subtler details as necessary to support the larger argument. Shows independent reading and thinking beyond the required course texts.	Copiously interacts with a significantly larger bibliography of high-quality sources than required by the assignment (e.g., around 20% of the essay's word count comes in citations).[2] Covers all necessary secondary literature irrespective of source type. Critically and fairly analyzes opposing arguments while citing the sources that advocate these opposing views. This analysis creates strong additional arguments for why the thesis is supported despite the objections raised by the opposing views.	Exhibits coherent and nearly flawless presentation (syntax, punctuation, style).
Above average or good (B) *Meets expectations with clear competence but minor weaknesses.*	Demonstrates solid competence with the subject. Critically analyzes and evaluates relevant concepts. Ably summarizes the subject and its content. Shows sound reading and thinking in the concepts covered within the course.	Carefully interacts with a modestly larger bibliography of high-quality sources than required by the assignment (e.g., around 15% of the essay's word count comes in citations). Includes secondary literature of multiple types of sources. Fairly acknowledges and describes opposing arguments while citing the sources that advocate these opposing views.	Provides coherent and mechanically competent presentation with infrequent and minor mistakes.

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[2] Here and below, the figures provided are for general ballparking purposes only. What constitutes very good or very poor bibliographic interaction depends significantly on the nature of a given project. But these figures should give you a good, rough idea of the kind of interaction you're looking to have.

Average (C) *Meets primary expectations with competence but noteworthy weaknesses.*	Demonstrates core competence with the subject but with some noticeable deficiencies. Shows good comprehension of core concepts while having minimal critical interaction with them. Adequately develops and presents arguments within the conceptual areas covered by the course.	Interacts with the amount of bibliography required by the assignment (e.g., around 10% of the essay's word count comes in citations). Includes secondary literature of only one type of source. May overlook or slightly mischaracterize opposing arguments or may cite only second- or third-hand reports of these opposing views rather than citing these views' own advocates.	Demonstrates mediocre coherence and mechanical competence with some frequent or significant mistakes.
Below average (D) *Meets primary expectations with limited competence and has noteworthy weaknesses.*	Demonstrates minimal core competence with the subject and shows noticeable deficiencies. Shows some comprehension of core concepts while exhibiting minimal independent thought and problematic critical interaction with these concepts. Insufficiently develops and presents arguments within the conceptual areas covered by the course.	Interacts occasionally with less than the amount of bibliography required by the assignment (e.g., around 5% of the essay's word count comes in citations). May overlook or mischaracterize opposing arguments in ways that fundamentally weaken those opposing arguments.	Demonstrates insufficient coherence and mechanical competence with both frequent and significant mistakes. Exhibits noticeable awkwardness in using language.

Failing (F) *Fails to meet primary expectations to any substantive degree.*	Demonstrates no meaningful competence with the subject. Shows significant and noticeable deficiencies. Exhibits questionable comprehension of core concepts and no or problematic attempts to interact with them. Primarily quotes and summarizes other sources or otherwise fails to develop a coherent argument about the subject.	Interacts sparingly with significantly less than the amount of bibliography required by the assignment (e.g., hardly any of the essay's word count comes in citations). May seriously misrepresent or ignore opposing arguments.	Demonstrates notably poor coherence and mechanical competence with both frequent and significant mistakes. Exhibits noticeably frequent awkwardness in using language.