GRADING CRITERIA FOR ENGLISH 101

In an effort to unify grading standards, as much as possible, among our diverse 101 faculty, I’ve borrowed some language from Douglas Hesse and William Irmscher to develop the following. Please consider distributing these criteria to your students, and, if you’d like an electronic copy that you can cut-n-paste into your syllabus, email me at trj@tulane.edu. You might also find some of this language useful as you comment on student work and explain a particular grade. Important: a paper does not have to fulfill all or even most of the criteria for a particular grade to earn that grade; rather, its most prominent features will locate it on one or another of these general levels.

The A Paper ... is characterized by the freshness, ambition, maturity, coherence, and complexity of its content. Its claims are stated clearly and effectively, supported well, with relevant nuances interpreted and delineated in ways that go beyond the obvious. It manifests a distinctive voice that explicitly engages a meaningful rhetorical context and, in turn, an actual audience. It situates itself thoroughly among assigned readings, perhaps even key, related texts in public discourse. It effectively balances the specific and the general, the compelling detail and the larger point, personal experiences and direct observations of the outer world. It grows out of large-scale revisions (both in terms of content and structure). It not only fulfills the assignment, but inventively uses the assignment as an occasion to excel. Its only errors are purely typographical and quite rare. Finally, it manifests a certain stylistic flair – the bon mot, the well-turned phrase, the significant metaphor – that helps to make it, for the reader, memorable.

The B Paper ... is characterized by content that is a relatively familiar, less daring, less integrated or a little simpler than one might hope. Its claims could use more support or more exploration, or could perhaps be stated more directly. Its voice could be more distinct and it could situate itself more engagingly in the rhetorical context and go farther to reach its audience. It could do more with the assigned readings, create a better balance between specific and general, detail and idea, personal anecdote and larger point. It fulfills the assignment, but in a way slightly perfunctory. It makes very few errors and shows no systematic misunderstanding of the fundamentals of grammar, but its overall structure might appear somewhat uneven. Finally, it could benefit from more large-scale revision and from more careful attention to its style at the sentence-by-sentence level.

The C Paper ... is characterized by overmuch dependence on the self-evident, is dotted with cliché, and is inadequately informative. Its essential point is uninteresting or only hazily set forth or developed aimlessly. It has no particular voice, nor any significant sense of context or audience, nor any real engagement with other texts. In terms of the dynamics between detail and idea, it seems to lose the forest-for-the-trees or vice versa. It fulfills the assignment but does so in a way wholly perfunctory. It has grammatical errors that significantly disrupt the reading experience. It has not been sufficiently revised.

The D Paper ... is characterized by minimal thought and effort, which shows through the absence of a meaningful, central idea or the lack of any controlled development of that idea. It fails to fulfill some key aspect of the assignment. It makes no meaningful use of other texts nor ever situates itself in any sort of context. It needlessly offends its audience. Its sentences and paragraphs are both built around rigidly repeated formula and soon become predictable. It is riddled with error. It has apparently never been revised.
The F Paper ... is characterized by plagiarism or lateness or a total misunderstanding of the assignment or is simply incomprehensible owing to a plethora of error or desperately poor organization. It has not only not been revised – it really hasn’t been begun.