



WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR PAPERS AT GRINNELL?

I. STRUCTURAL COHERENCE

- A. Central Claim:** Can the reader identify in this piece of writing a central claim (e.g., philosophical assertion, research finding, textual interpretation, thesis, contention) which is supportable, as opposed to a declaration of established fact or of unassailable personal belief? If non-analytical, does the piece have a focus or central idea that guides its structure?
- B. Introduction and Conclusion:** Does the opening passage announce the principal question to be addressed, while at the same time establishing the rhetorical mode and diction (speaker's voice addressing an implied audience)? Does the closing passage leave the reader with a clear sense of the central claim? As appropriate, does it suggest implications of this claim?
- C. Unity:** Does the piece keep its focus, as opposed to straying into digression or bifurcating into divergent paths?
- D. Development:** Does every part stand in some definable relation to the central claim or structuring idea? Do the sentences and paragraphs in the piece of writing form an effective sequence, connected and arranged so that each part seems reasonably to follow from what preceded it?
1. For a first version of the thesis, make a simple statement about your subject.
 2. Look at it critically. Ask yourself: does it state more than the obvious? is it important, interesting and argumentative? does it predict how you'll support this argument?
 3. Make the language succinct and clear; try to write the thesis in one sentence, two maximum.
1. Think about who your audience is – the professor, the class, or the average educated reader. Doing so will help you set your tone and decide what evidence you'll need.
 2. Don't start with obvious or dictionary definitions, well-known facts or commonplaces.
 3. Don't start off broadly; get to the point. State your thesis within the first few sentences.
 4. Recap your argument, then ask yourself: SO WHAT? Imagine an antagonistic reader who says, "Oh, that doesn't matter." Argue back: make clear why it does.
1. Make sure that your ideas in each paragraph all relate to the topic sentence (it helps to make the topic sentence the first one) and that topic sentences relate to the thesis. One way to ensure this relationship is by repeating key words.
 2. Make sure your evidence is relevant and accurate; delete ideas that don't fit or move them to where they do.
1. After you brainstorm and/or freewrite to discover what you have to say, try creating an outline; sketch out the main subpoints and place supporting evidence underneath.
 2. Emphasize important points by putting them at the beginning or end of the paragraph.
 3. Anticipate opposing arguments and deal with them. You may concede certain points, then qualify your own argument. Or you may rebut opposing arguments with strong evidence.

II. CONVENTIONS

Mechanics: Does the piece demonstrate competence in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and standard idioms of written English? Does the manuscript's appearance conform to standard guidelines?

Citations/Graphics: If present, do the quotations, footnotes, and non-narrative features (figures, equations, tables, etc.) appear in conventional format? Does this material effectively support the central claim?

Academic Discipline: As appropriate, does this piece of writing conform to the conventions of professional writing within a specific academic discipline?

1. **Vary your sentence length. Too many simple sentences can sound immature; too many complex ones can lose your reader. (Sentence complexity should be determined by the complexity of the thought.)**
2. **Put the main idea in the main clause. (Subordinate subordinate thoughts!)**
3. **Use active voice, vigorous verbs and real subjects (avoid *it* and *this* as the subject; don't overuse the verb *to be*)**
4. **Delete redundant, nonsensical and even blah sentences.**
5. **Use your dictionary but not until you have read the entire entry. Resort to a thesaurus with a critical eye; check the dictionary before you use a synonym you find in a thesaurus. Synonymous does not mean interchangeable.**
6. **Avoid jargon, clichés, slang, and sexist language.**
7. **Observe and imitate good writers; take risks with your writing.**

III. INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Finally, does this piece reveal a writer who is curious and involved –someone who reflects and questions? Does this writer acknowledge implications and internal tensions, rather than oversimplifying the subject or covering the assignment in a perfunctory manner? Behind this piece of writing, can one perceive a mind attentive to subtleties of language and to the complexity of material under analysis?

1. **Think about the values and assumptions underlying what you read.**
2. **Try making a reading outline in which you delineate the author's thesis and subpoints.**
3. **Question the author's thesis. Does he or she write convincingly, using adequate evidence, or leave you with questions?**
4. **To look for tensions within a text, try making a chart of opposing themes or values.**