

**Professor Theresa Kelley**

**E 167**

**(Adapted, with thanks, from Professor David Zimmerman)**

### **Grading Guidelines**

An "A" essay is excellent and makes us think about the text or the ideas explored in the text in a new way. The essay gives us new insight on, or a new way to think about, the language of the text and the topics, problems or questions it offers. The essay has a clear and compelling thesis that is supported with careful, well argued evidence from the text. That evidence might be linguistic (what words mean, whether they have more than one meaning that continues to resonate in the text); comparisons of scenes, lines of poetry, figures of speech, or other formal, that is structural or generic, elements (by *structural* I mean how the work is built and shaped; by *generic* I mean the way the genre of the text—that is whether it is a novel or a poetic genre of some kind) is supported or altered by the text at hand; or close textual illustration of a theme or idea or principle. Each paragraph of the essay develops a discrete analytical claim and conveys this claim in its topic (usually its opening) sentence; the claim developed in each paragraph clearly and strategically advances (i.e., builds upon, nuances, qualifies) the claim developed in the previous paragraph. Each paragraph represents a clear, useful step that propels the argument to its conclusion.

A "B" essay is good. It will have a clear thesis supported with adequate textual analysis. Its organization will be coherent, with each paragraph serving as a clear and useful step in the development of the overall argument. However, its argument lacks needed development in some areas. The textual analysis that supports the essay's thesis may not be original or penetrating enough to substantially advance our understanding of the text or the ideas explored by the text.

The "C" paper will have a recognizable attempt at a thesis statement and show some effort to support it with observations about the text. The essay may have lapses in clarity, logic, or coherence. Its analytical payoff may be anemic or opaque. Its textual analysis and its larger claims about the author's intentions may seem obvious and may not diverge significantly from points made in lecture or discussion. The logic organizing the argument may be unclear or unproductive.

The "D" essay meets the minimum page length requirement but has no clear analytical payoff. This might be because it contains mostly plot summary instead of analysis; or its major claims are not readily discernible (perhaps because its prose is confusing or tangled); or it fails to develop a coherent or comprehensible thesis; or its logical organization fails to cohere or advance.