



TATP TIPSHEET

Grading at Your Best: Humanities And Social Sciences

Grading is a substantial part of most TA assignments at the U of T. You may be asked to grade tests, exams, quizzes, research papers, or perhaps book reviews or field reports. This sheet offers general strategies to consider when grading.

Grading Essays, Research Papers, and Reports

- Written assignments are expected to present a well-composed answer to the assigned question. Both style and content are important to the final grade.
- In general, ask how well the paper answers the assigned question, with attention to the following:
 - Is there a clear argument? Does the paper analyze, or simply describe?
 - Is the argument supported at each stage with evidence?
 - Is there a clear structure? Does each paragraph have a topic statement?
 - Does the paper “read” well, with clear grammar, spelling, and phrasing?
 - Does the paper answer all parts of the question?
- Your feedback should ultimately make clear the reason for the grade.
 - Your instructor may give you a grading sheet on which to write feedback. This can be especially helpful in a large course, or when there are several graders.
 - At the end of the essay, include general comments that speak to the strengths and weaknesses of the paper as a whole. Marginal comments can be used in the text of the paper to point out more specific errors or successful points. Keep in mind that you must indicate to the student where and how they can improve their writing for future assignments.
 - If possible, type up your summative comments on the computer—this serves the two-fold purpose of giving your students well-composed and documented comments as well as providing you with a saved copy of your final comments.
 - Comment honestly. Give praise only to the strong parts.
 - Beware of “borderline” grades, such as 79/80 (B+/A-). A 78 and a 79 have the same GPA value, but a 79 is more likely to lead to a grade dispute.
- Weak style is a barrier when it hinders the clarity of otherwise good evidence. Both ELL (English language learner) students and native English speakers can face challenges at writing well. Read carefully, from a holistic perspective, to understand what the student is trying to say.
- Select “range-finder” papers to serve as prototypical “A”, “B”, “C” papers.
- When in doubt, consult the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Grading Scale:
<http://www.artsandscience.utoronto.ca/ofr/calendar/rules.htm#grading>

Grading Tests and Exams

- Tests and exams do not include the same expectations of style and composition as in essays. Content is emphasized over style in forming the final grade.
- Following the grading scheme provided by the instructor, scan the paper for key points, words, and phrases. Verify what types of responses may earn part marks.
- Final exams do not generally require comments. Mark-up the paper with “checks” for correct points, “X’s” for incorrect points, and a few words on what was missing or done well.
- Grade “question-by-question” rather than “paper-by-paper”. This will help you grade faster and read more efficiently. At the end, verify points were added correctly.

Remember to take breaks when you need to, keep yourself refreshed, and read papers with a clear mind, so you can grade at your best!

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