
The Grading Guide for English W131

The following descriptions show what we value in student writing in the IUPUI Writing Program. These descriptions are designed to be a guide to grading decisions in W131. They emerge from our discussions about what faculty find true about portfolios that are “Passing” (baseline to pass the course), “Better than Passing” (A or B work), and “Below Passing” (C-, D, or F work).

The passing descriptions are more detailed because this is the level student work must reach to pass the course. At the “Better than Passing” and “Below Passing” levels, the assumption is that after reviewing the passing descriptions, one then considers the merits of a portfolio given the additional information of the other two lists.

As stated above, this document is designed to be a guide to grading. Individual faculty will determine a portfolio’s grade based on what has occurred in an individual section, with this guide used as a reminder of what we value generally in portfolios at the various levels.

Passing

Text Engagement through Writing:

- The writer is able to read critically by engaging with ideas and texts, questioning some ideas he or she reads, adding to or enhancing others, and indicating why the questioning or enhancing is a good idea.
- The writer uses summary, synthesis and analysis appropriately when engaging sources in his or her text.
- The writer comprehends the purposes of summarizing, paraphrasing, and responding to sources.
- The writer also comprehends the difference between summarizing, paraphrasing, and responding to sources.
- The writer attempts to create or represent a conversation on the topic he or she is writing about through the use of outside sources.
- The writer has some awareness of the value of attributive tags in creating or representing a conversation of his or her topic (i.e., language that signals or references the source of information). Sources are used accurately, ethically, and appropriately. No plagiarism.
- The writer uses examples to engage his or her topic appropriately and sufficiently.

Developmental and Organizational Strategies:

- The writer uses questions and prewriting activities to generate drafts.
- Essay introductions lead readers into the essay and introduce the essay’s topic.
- In thesis-based essays, thesis statements appear early, forecasting content, and asserting a debatable position.
- The writer also recognizes the value of using a variety of organizational patterns that promote his or her purpose, the interests of the audience, and the communication of the thesis or theme.
- Paragraph topic sentences are used to relate to an essay’s main idea (its thesis or theme).
- Supporting details in paragraphs expand ideas expressed in topic sentences, giving fuller meaning to an essay’s theme or thesis.
- The writer demonstrates understanding that strategies of coherence (transitional phrasing and the thoughtful repetition, restatement, or “echoing” of words and phrases) help move a reader forward through an essay.
- Essays conclude in an appropriate and even meaningful way.
- Reflective writing demonstrates the intent to develop an active writing process.

Develop Ideas Beyond Familiar Thinking:

- The writer attempts to move beyond familiar thinking by actively engaging with outside ideas from texts, classmates, and the instructor.
- The writer develops reasonable questions, responses, and assertions in the process of challenging his or her own thinking or the thinking of others.
- The writer attempts original ideas in his or her papers while keeping readers’ needs in mind.

Revision:

- The writer responds to feedback from peers and instructor by implementing changes in a text.
- The writer challenges his or her previous ideas by posing new questions.
- The writer revises aspects of his or her paper as ideas are challenged.
- The writer approaches his or her revision strategy as an extension of the composing process that helped him or her produce previous drafts.

Final Product:

- The papers follow instructions and guidelines.
- It is apparent that papers address interesting questions.
- The papers show focus.
- Final drafts reflect the awareness that standard conventions of usage (as in grammar and punctuation) are important rhetorical concerns and need to be addressed in order for a writer to be effective with readers.
- Evidence of revision appears.
- The writer can write thoughtfully about his or her process of composing and drafting a paper in writer’s statements.
- The writer can assert claims in the retrospective about how well course goals have been achieved as if the writer is a lawyer making a case for the audience.
- Analysis in the retrospective also identifies areas of improvement and opportunities for continued growth (the writer can be critical of his or her own writing).
- Each paper has as a title that summarizes what the essay is about.
- MLA documentation style is used appropriately with few errors.

Better than Passing

Text Engagement through Writing:

- A creative identification with the reading is evident in the writing.
- The writer uses attributive tags and transitional phrasing to create an interesting, if not compelling, conversation with the sources.
- Because of how the writer uses examples, the essays of the portfolio prove more interesting to read.
- The examples the writer uses show a deeper engagement with the topic.

Developmental and Organizational Strategies:

- Drafts of the portfolio are compelling to read because the writer grapples with complexity from draft to draft.
- Drafts of the portfolio become stronger as one reads them.
- It is apparent the writer has thought carefully about how to organize the papers found in the portfolio; the writing stays on track.
- Textual features like transitional phrasing and the thoughtful repetition, restatement, or “echoing” of words and phrases help to create topical coherence in the essay, leading to compelling reading.
- Reflective writing shows the writer can thoughtfully assess his or her writing and his or her writing process.
- Reflective writing shows the writer has a sense of comfort with the writing process.

Develop Ideas Beyond Familiar Thinking:

- The writer shows that intellectual complexity is an important priority.
- The writer obviously takes risks.
- The writer expresses truly creative ideas and insights.
- The writer creatively adapts to the assignments.

Revision:

- The writer moves beyond his or her initial conceptions while revising. In the process, subject matter changes are apparent between drafts.
- The writer thoughtfully responds to peer and instructor response.
- Work with the language leads to writing that is both engaging and clear. (In fact, it may be so good that you don't notice it.)

Final Product:

- The writer shows a good sense of style through stylistic devices like repetition, use of metaphor, and use of sentence variety.
- As a result of the work with style and stylistic devices, a voice is apparent that is sincere, confident, and best of all, enthusiastic.
- The writer appears to have fun with the language.
- The writer obviously makes a personal investment in the writing (the texts read as if the writer “owns” or feels quite comfortable discussing the topics).
- A clear thesis (or theme, if relevant to the type of essay) appears and the details support an insightful point of view.
- Paper titles are catchy.
- MLA documentation style is used well.

Below Passing

Text Engagement through Writing:

- Few examples may be used to back up ideas.
- If sources are used, the writer misses the point or misinterprets the sources.
- Sources are used in bits and pieces scattered all over the essay rather than used cohesively.
- There is little to no interaction (or conversation) with the sources.
- Few citations appear, which suggests that the writer fails to understand that sources need documentation and credit.

Developmental and Organizational Strategies:

- The writing lacks purpose, suggesting the writer is struggling with how to express his or her ideas.
- There is weak organizational structure.
- Little to no audience awareness appears in the essays and where appropriate, the reflective writing. (The audience may decide that an essay is boring to read because little compels a reader to move on.)
- Weak transitions appear between the major parts of essays.
- Reflective writing offers no analysis of the writer's own process.

Develop Ideas Beyond Familiar Thinking:

- The writing in the portfolio shows that no risk taking is occurring.
- Essays depend too much on binary thinking.
- The writer fails to grapple with the complexities of issues.

Revision:

- Revision is superficial, because based on a literal reading of what the instructor wants rather than a thoughtful analysis of how an essay may better appeal to an audience
- Because little time has been put into revising, the essays are less polished: it is obvious that additional drafts are needed

Final Product:

- Papers are written as if book reports for the teacher rather than essays for a larger audience.
- The writer struggles to complete assignment goals.
- A reader may come away from the essay thinking, “I expected more.”
- The essays become less and less reader friendly the more one reads.
- Essays may follow what an assignment asks, but offer an audience few insights.
- The essays reveal little to no audience awareness.
- Problems with grammar and usage interfere with clarity.
- Failure to document appropriately using MLA style.