

GRADING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

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During an interview for a position as an assistant professor of English at an East Coast, state-funded, historically black university, one interviewer asked the female candidate if she felt comfortable using a shared syllabus. The candidate envisioned a group of professors with ideas and teaching practices similar to her own, and imagined collaborative teaching, the sharing of ideas, and many research opportunities. The woman did not probe much further; her husband had already accepted a lucrative job offer from a major corporation in this area of the country. She did not ask how writing was taught at this particular institution, nor did she inquire as to why the faculty used this approach. She wanted and needed this job. “Of course, no problem,” she said, and thus began the worst semester of her teaching career.

Immediately after she signed her contract, the new assistant professor was handed the department’s English 102 Composition and Literature syllabus. The first three pages of the course outline seemed typical of most freshman writing courses. It was the next three pages, devoted to “Essay Evaluation and Grade Distribution,” that worried her. For seven years, she had graded essays holistically, using portfolios. The shared syllabus asked her to use a mathematical formula as a means to reward or deduct points for such things as mechanical correctness and adequate development of ideas. Her new university’s and her own systems of assessment were at odds with one another.

In an increasingly competitive and constraining academic environment, instructors often must accept employment with institutions that do not necessarily share their pedagogical philosophies or goals, be they radical or conservative. For the sake of employment, these teachers must enter discourse communities that are not only unfamiliar, but downright problematic. The subject of our story embarked on the worst semester of her teaching career not merely because she agreed to use her new university's grading system, but also because those grading practices conflicted with her philosophical beliefs and impinged on her teaching practices.

This essay explores the problems that arose from this situation as a means to discuss some broader theoretical concerns about grading, particularly with regard to the issue of student empowerment. We examine the conflict between this professor and her university through the lenses of historical materialism and cultural studies, and offer a way to make the discussion of grades and grading a more useful and liberating subject of classroom debate.

A Compositionist's View of Grading

Perhaps because the situation we describe above is so commonplace, the issue of grading is the focus of several new collections of essays (Zak and Weaver; Allison, Bryant, and Hourigan; Tchudi). In one of these collections, *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*, a number of contributors offer portfolio assessment as one such alternative. By deferring grades until the end of the term, instructors who use portfolios can "extend the duration of the 'writing environment,'" an environment within which students are more engaged with writing than grading (Sommers "Bringing Practice" 156, 159). Though grades are deferred, many teachers who consider portfolio assessment to be a viable alternative to standard grading practices spend a good deal

of time in class discussing the criteria that will eventually provide the basis of assessment because they feel that these discussions give rise to a communally generated set of writing standards. As Kathleen Jones argues, “The portfolio conference shifts the evaluation and assigning of grades from something done by the teacher to the student to the perspective of a *shared responsibility* in assessing what has been accomplished” (emphasis hers) (262). The student assesses his or her own work and, therefore, theoretically shares, in some measure, the responsibility for giving himself or herself a final grade.

The subject of our story had been trained to teach writing at a large state university where portfolios were the method of assessment. Such a program had been developed because its directors believed that portfolio grading “helps the learning climate [by reinforcing] continuing effort and improvement: it encourages students to try to revise and improve poor work rather than feel punished by it or give up” (Elbow *xv*). Portfolios foster, she concurred, a classroom environment in which students learn to question and examine rules and conventions and to think for themselves. For her, no single piece of writing indicated writing abilities. In her portfolio-based classroom, students usually drafted and re-drafted many pieces of writing, a number of which they eventually abandoned. Her students’ portfolios, she believed, were generated from a communally negotiated set of writing standards. Through workshop style courses, with conferences, peer response groups, discussion of rhetorical strategies in professional and student writing, and written teacher comments, the students learned to recognize and to produce quality writing. Students then chose the two or three pieces of writing that they considered to be their best work for final grading. Typically, she provided both prose explanations of how she read (see the criteria sheet in Appendix B) and letter grades based on the tendencies in ability that she saw in the students’ work.

When asked, most of her students had in the past indicated that they appreciated the grading policy under the portfolio system because they knew from the start of the class that, with effort, they could master the basics of writing composition. After a first diagnostic portfolio, students knew the patterns they needed to strengthen and those they needed to eliminate. They knew what they had to do and what were the grade possibilities. Students with few strengths and many weaknesses would often say to her, “I know I can get my writing to C quality this semester, but there is too much here that doesn’t work to get to the A.” Using this system, she seldom heard a complaint about the grades assigned; in truth, 99 percent of the students asked to grade themselves using her criteria sheet could and did do so accurately.

The pedagogy in the instructor’s new university asked writing instructors to assume “the role of an expert, a literary critic who imparts knowledge about texts, ways of reading them and principles governing their form and style” (Lindemann 290). Instructors were to make corrections concerning form and style, using a mathematical formula provided by the department (see Appendix A). Within this system, the student was viewed as an amateur who needed to memorize the rules that govern the structures of the discourse studied (narrative, descriptive, etc.) and ways to avoid breaking them.

The university assumed, furthermore, that its grading formula made the rationale behind grades self-evident; it assumed that the students understood what was meant by *thesis*, for example, so that instructors used only grades, no comments. Under the portfolio system, our writing instructor’s students had used her criteria sheets and presumably understood them; they could do accurate self-evaluations. The students using her new university’s system could not self-evaluate. As amateurs, they could not possibly know how to determine the accurate number of points to be given for each category (how many points for thesis,

organization, etc.). The new assistant professor considered this grading system punitive, with its negative focus (do not do this or that), and believed that it could only make the teacher-student relationship adversarial. Our subject's assumption that self-evaluation and metacognition were integral to learning to write well, since one had to learn what worked individually and what did not, was not a viable assumption in the system of evaluation at this particular state university.

Though she recognized the disparity between the former and present models for teaching composition and could easily explain why she preferred a writing-as-process model over the writing-as-product model in use at the university (see Lindemann), she had agreed to use the common syllabus. She feared, however, that the assessment she was being asked to use would not only encourage conformity, but would convince students that writing was a chore, another scholastic hoop, rather than a mode of communication or a tool for thinking. Hence, as she planned a weekly calendar, she attempted to integrate the two methods, using as much leeway as the departmental syllabus would allow. The integration was unsuccessful, for the students quickly came forward with telling questions.

- If I make an error three times in one paper but not at all in another, how many points will you deduct?
- If I have a strong thesis in two of three papers, how many points do I lose on the portfolio for the paper that has a looser thesis?
- If my development, thesis, and mechanics are strong and my organization is weak, how will I earn any points in the effectiveness category?
- With regard to effectiveness, if any of the other categories are weak, can I ever get a high grade in the effectiveness category?

Why is subject-verb agreement a major error, while pronoun-antecedent agreement is a minor error?

This instructor could not answer these questions well, because she did not believe in the theoretical framework that supported the logical responses to these questions.

What is more, each time she introduced assignments she had used in previous semesters, she found her assignments at odds with the more traditional grading system. For example, when she introduced a process journal assignment, where students were to record how they produced each piece of writing, students questioned her motives. How many points was this journal worth and how many points would she take off for each mechanical error? In the past, the process journal was graded along with the group of essays submitted for the portfolio. Now, she needed to differentiate this part of the students' writing from the formal essays.

By the end of the semester, it was clear that the new assistant professor's students were not being well served precisely because the institution's and her own methods of assessment were too far apart. It was not simply an issue of her grades being too low or too high; the grades themselves indicated no difference between her class and other composition courses in the department. Yet, grades and grading, standards and teaching practices were not intrinsically working.

An Historical Materialist View of Grading

One of historical materialists' primary tenets is that while the academy is a site of struggle between dominant and exploited groups, the educational system itself often works to inculcate specific attitudes, beliefs, and values that reinforce class, race and gender differences, maintaining the status quo (See Smithson). Historical materialists might view grades as an instrument used by

the academy to “maintain a caste system in which the smart get smarter (and later richer) and the dumb get dumber (and later poorer)” (Holaday 38). Grades can help to limit students’ career choices and their power to transform their social and economic status.

So too can the teaching methods that support a particular grading system. At this particular university, the instructor was asked to devote a good deal of class time to teaching and reviewing grammar workbook exercises. The university seemed less interested in how a student’s writing might effect change in either the system or the psychic lives of its subjects. It seemed only to want students to create “functional” pieces, i.e., mechanically and stylistically perfect essays.

Nor did its writing program intend for students to become involved in the grading process; students were merely to perform the tasks that they were assigned. Despite being an African-American institution of higher learning, it had adopted a grading system associated with more conservative and predominantly white institutions. Sandra Kamusikiri argues persuasively that the American grading system “has tended to impose Anglocentric writing standards without sufficient appreciation of the cultural and linguistic expression of other groups” such as African-Americans (188). From an historical materialist perspective, the questions that African-American students from this university raised about their journal writing suggest that the university’s Anglocentric grading system may have affected negatively students’ ability to gain control over their writing processes. Their questions suggest as well that despite their instructor’s more progressive philosophy and teaching methodology, the required grading practice had also interfered with students’ ability to assume cultural and linguistic power and authority.

As implied above, our assistant professor believes that portfolio assessment “provides a means for engaging students in self-

reflection and for acknowledging their role as collaborators in the learning process . . . Receiving peer response, interacting in writing conferences, having a teacher who is a writing coach . . . are all ways that students may become active participants in the learning community and authors with readers” (Murphy and Grant 294). She consciously experiences evaluation both “as a personalized teaching device, to help students learn more effectively” (White 12), and as a collaborative process through which students master academic discourse and generate new knowledge about writing and reading.

As she discovered, though, involving students in certain aspects of the assessment process does not necessarily empower them as writers and readers—even within a portfolio system. Though students often choose their best work to be assessed in portfolios, for instance, their ability to satisfy such criteria as “the writings in this portfolio demonstrate excellence in form, content, and style” will be, to a large degree, assessed subjectively by the teacher or a group of teachers at the end of the term. For students who write in programs that employ collaborative methods of assessment, the grade may not take into account a student’s growth as a writer over a period of time; it may only indicate students’ abilities to achieve specific goals—a less than holistic method of assessing students’ overall achievements. Ann Westcott Dodd notes that team scorers who lack the context that produces a piece of writing grade it differently than the teacher who assigned it; Jeffrey Sommers argues persuasively that personal interaction or knowledge of a student often results in a higher grade (“Grading”). Both Dodd’s and Sommers’ arguments suggest that our notions about the place and value of objectivity and subjectivity in the grading process need themselves to be reevaluated.

Examining two grading methods from the perspective of historical materialism, then, we realize that the problem is not

merely that the more traditionally-oriented university's philosophy clashes with that of the female assistant professor. The writing instructor's own ideologies of teaching make grading a vexed issue. While initially it appears that this institution of higher learning and its writing instructor occupy opposite poles with regard to grading practices, the historical materialist view helps us to discover that in fact they do not.

First, given her position as a woman working in an historically black institution and her apparently feminist and social constructivist attempts to involve students in the assessment process (see Linda Laube), one might assume that the subject of our story would also have found the traditional grading system oppressive because of the way it has historically been implicated in the reproduction of unjust social relations (sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism) (Simon 60–61). While she may have, there is no clear evidence that the portfolio system of grading is any less implicated. She does not appear to consider, that is, whether or not portfolio assessment might also uphold Androcentric writing standards.

Second, like the university itself, this writing instructor assumes that assessment as a tool will increase her own and her institution's efficiency, accountability and objectivity. For instance, while she has no mathematical formula, she does, when using portfolios, have a set of objective criteria that, if mastered, presumably guarantee students a particular grade ("I know I can get my writing to C quality . . ."). Like her current employers, she believes writing to be a measurable skill. Hence, her request to students to evaluate themselves may simply be, in their eyes, an exercise which will, just as the workbook exercises demonstrate their grammatical proficiency, demonstrate that they understand the rules by which she grades them. Neither grammar book nor collaborative scoring exercises can guarantee students will be able to write well in the future—or evaluate well their own writing,

given that other teachers, other employers, other rhetorical situations will very likely give rise to whole new sets of rules and criteria for success.

As Stephen Tchudi readily admits, “the vast majority of English/language arts teachers will, throughout their teaching careers, be faced with the periodic need to sum up students’ work by some set of criteria and to translate that performance into a grade that goes on a report card or transcript” (xxi). While most portfolio systems delay grading until the end of the semester, the evaluation system is not wholly unlike that in courses where students receive grades at earlier and more regular intervals. Even if teachers grade “only what students select as their exemplary work,” they may still discourage those students by assessing it to be a B rather than an A portfolio. If students feel crushed, disappointed, or lose their self-confidence because a teacher has, inadvertently or not, knocked them down with a grade, it is hard to “help them back up and encourage them to continue” writing (Ketter and Hunter) when that teacher never sees them again.

While the teacher-student relationship may very well be less adversarial in the portfolio classroom during the course of the semester itself, students know that they are being judged and evaluated on performance, and ultimately on a final product. As Eric Crump puts it, “Grades are a vortex around which all classroom activity whirls, pulled inexorably inward” (209). Our subject’s criteria sheets, for instance, keep students mindful that they will indeed receive a grade at the end of the semester.

Our subject ultimately gives a student whose paper fails to achieve its rhetorical purpose, whether it be a poorly organized or stylistically flawed effort, a poor grade, just as the educational institution wishes. For the student, then, the final product, the grade, is the same. One might cynically offer at this point that an A or F is what matters in the end to a student trained within a system that valorizes grades. Despite her attempts to stress

process and writing for a rhetorical purpose, her students' questions indicate that their purpose is only to achieve the best grade.

While she believes, as theorists such as Pat Bizzell and Gerald Graff argue, that students need to “master academic discourse to become more critical as thinkers and more effective as citizens” (Graff 127), this assistant professor also acknowledges that she sees writing as something required by the state for fully functioning employees. While she holds that students can express a unique self, she also believes that that self needs to be mediated or even suppressed if it interferes with the goals and rules of a particular discourse community. Rather than being developed in relation to the current curriculum, for example, her writing assignments are narrowly prescribed from assignments she has developed in other teaching situations. The thrust of her assignments is toward standardization (See Murphy and Grant). A student quickly learns that he needs to suppress his optimistic self if he wants to write satire, for instance, while an assertive, forthright student learns just as quickly to be passive in her scientific discourse. Hence, our subject herself invests with authority those discourses associated with various state apparatuses and institutions, seeing her own job as one that helps to produce workers for the state. In substance, she agrees to uphold the same standards that individual discourse communities ask to be upheld. Because she aligns herself with the educational institution, viewing her own role as imparting knowledge that will help students in the world of work, she, like the university which employs her, views the teacher as an expert reader with a specialized body of knowledge to impart to her amateur students.

A problem lies also in our professor's vision of what grades mean to her students. She assumes that a poor grade indicates to students that they have yet to learn how to write with purpose to a specific audience. As in any university classroom, however, she,

as the bestower of the final grade, is ultimately that specific audience. Because she alone has the power to bestow the grade, at least in her students' minds, she may well remain what Trimbur calls the "expert" in the text. Many students may simply view the grades she gives as indicating whether their ideas agreed with hers, the respected authority figure in her classroom (Ketter and Hunter 114). As Lindemann points out, students quickly learn what sorts of selves the teacher would like to see in their writing and how those teachers want students to talk about grades.

In order to work well, portfolio programs, like other types of writing programs, "demonstrate how we want [students] to hop . . . whether we want them to hop far, or high, or steadily, or beautifully" (Ketter and Hunter 119). Whether or not she plays the part of writing coach, students understand that players who do not heed the coach's suggestions, however they are expressed, suffer the consequences. Those students who do not express a self consistent with the discourse conventions called for by the teacher suffer as well. With no real negotiation of her criteria for grades, students may merely learn how to apply her rules to their papers. In actuality, therefore, the university we examine here and its new hire seem much more closely aligned than they first appeared.

Lest we oversimplify the problem, however, by representing all teachers as members of the dominant social order and students as members of the exploited, Richard Ohmann reminds us that "society needs help from the schools to justify its present divisions . . . There is pressure—indirect but heavy—on teachers of literature to join in this effort. The ruling classes want a culture, including a literature and a criticism, that supports the social order" (25). In other words, the educational institution often exerts as much pressure on teachers to conform to grading standards and practices as it exerts on students. The subject of our story felt oppressed by the institution when it demanded that she use its grading criteria, and worried how this grading system

would harm her students. And many of this woman's students who were first-generation, working class college students, in fact, wanted to conform to the standards of white capitalist culture: they wanted to be able to produce and use well the discourse associated with those who hold public power. They, too, put pressure on her when they vocalized their desire to know how to make the best grade.

Theoretically, her experience with the portfolio system should have made it easier to debate and investigate the usefulness and purpose of the grading system within which she and her students found themselves. Both she and her students might have made more sense of the practice of grading at her institution if she had revealed her own conflicts about that practice.

For the writing instructor who was forced to confront a conflict in assessment agendas, a difficult aspect of her students' questions about grading came, of course, from having to negotiate her own authority as a teacher when she responded to them. To respond simply, "Those are the department's rules" would have been to negate her own authority, even if she offered that response as a means both to acknowledge her responsibility to adhere to departmental policy and to disassociate herself from those rules. She would have risked also mystifying further the grading system she had been asked to employ. To reveal her belief that these rules were somewhat arbitrary was to risk hindering, from her own social constructivist perspective, the students' power to master the rules that would make them successful in the work force. From her perspective, there was no satisfactory way to answer their questions; hence she caved in to students' requests that she grade their journal writing as well as their formal essays.

A Cultural Studies View of Grading

An historical materialist reading of grades and grading gives rise to a very cynical and pessimistic vision indeed. The instructor

attempted to socialize students into a particular set of community practices concerning writing and assessment, but she did so without examining fully or explicitly the work that these practices do to maintain, ultimately, the status quo. The above reading suggests that through grading the state's domination of both the students and the writing instructor is complete.

Viewing this woman's crisis at her new university through a cultural studies lens, however, we can see a silver lining to the cloud we have been seeding. From our perspective, the writing instructor's pedagogy had begun to invest her students with the authority to articulate their concerns, to question actively the dominant power rather than to follow orders passively. Her students' questions imply that they too found grades to be oppressive. Their desire to discuss them, furthermore, may have expressed the students' desire to negotiate and to resist the limits and constraints of the grading system within which they found themselves.

One of the central goals of cultural studies is to find "the relatively autonomous areas of public and private life where human agency can mediate between the material conditions of the dominant order and the lived experience and aspirations of the popular masses" (Trimbur 11). A cultural studies pedagogy tries to find ways, that is, to help students to articulate and to enact authoritatively views that may conflict with those in power, so that they might transform their own lives and possibly effect change in the world-at-large.

Many teachers believe that much of their job is to help students become better critical thinkers and writers. Because of the way it can discourage and inhibit students' progress, the specter of a grade in the course can interfere with achieving this goal. So that students become better critical thinkers and writers and resist the more debilitating and restrictive aspects of grades, the next step might be to engage them more explicitly in a cultural critique of

grading as a social practice. While any number of scholars discuss the political implications of portfolio assessment, and while theorists like Gerald Graff suggest that teachers ought to use “classroom debate as an opportunity to help students make sense of the clashes of viewpoints and values to which they are exposed” (125–126), grading as a cultural practice has not usually been the subject of such classroom debate. Granted, the criteria and the standards that teachers and students use to assess writing are often discussed. Sometimes teachers and students also discuss what it feels like to be graded and what purpose it serves. As composition teachers, however, we have previously left almost entirely unexamined our students’ and our own embeddedness in the history of grading itself. That is, we have not yet explored fully the “histories, memories, and social relations that are the ground for [our] understanding” of grading processes (Simon 61), nor have we examined our participation and complicity in those processes.

We might, therefore, see this young, female professor’s experience as one which encourages us to analyze grades as a kind of text and grading as a social practice. A cultural studies approach would encourage students to expand their definition of what constitutes texts, to view grades themselves as cultural, as embodiments of social processes, to “see how they are inhabited and what tendencies and pressures they exert” on their bestowers and their recipients (Trimbur). Examining them as such might help students and teachers alike to define, explore, and assert more authoritative and powerful subjectivities in the face of such sorts of socially oppressive texts and practices.

Cultural studies also does away with a hierarchy of readers. In terms of this issue, rather than viewing teachers as specialist critics whose interpretations of texts supersede those of students, we would view all readers as equal participants in the history of grading practices. A teacher who views grades as narrative forms

would initiate a debate in the composition classroom, endeavoring to expose the disparate assumptions that students and teachers have about grades. They might begin this debate by using sample evaluations of student writing to help students to develop a critical and theoretical vocabulary for talking about grading. Students and teachers might examine the history of grading. They could read and write about grades, discussing them as texts that promote particular kinds of negotiations over values in the classroom.

Among the questions professors and students at the instructor's new university might address are: What body institutionalized Standard English? When did questions of form become distinct from content? How has/does race influence grading practices at this particular institution? Is its approach to the teaching and grading of writing typical of other predominantly Afro-American institutions? Why would these kinds of institutions choose these teaching and assessment methodologies? What are the problems of teaching Afro-American students the dominant discourse? How do gender, class, and subjective taste influence grading practices? How do the students themselves participate in them? What is their role? What about parents' role? What is the content of a C? What does a C say to a student? a teacher? a parent? an administrator? a potential employer?

Those who put into practice cultural studies theory examine a specific cultural text in all its relations to other cultural texts. Hence, as Cary Nelson might argue, grading as a social practice must be "analyzed in terms of its competitive, reinforcing, and determining relations with other objects and cultural forces" (199). For example, on the most basic level, when they study the history of grading, students and teachers might look specifically at how and why the grading of writing differs from that of math and science.

Teachers and students might then discuss grades in relation to other narratives that determine the shape of the writing

curriculum, such as textbooks, administrators' memos to program heads regarding university-wide trends and practices of grading, and newspaper articles and movies that depict popular culture's views of grading and its purposes. For the most part, students and teachers alike have taken and continue to take for granted many assumptions about grades. Not too long ago, for instance, at a southern university, students were given the opportunity to change the grading system by adding pluses and minuses to the letter grades A, B, C, D, and F. The students voted against what many faculty considered to be a fairer means to assess student achievement. Students feared the effects of minuses on their cumulative averages; those who received As and 4.0s might see their averages drop. That students could receive B⁺s or C⁺s, rather than straight Bs or Cs, did not matter. Students believed that the university would use this new grading system only as a means to combat grade inflation.

The point is not that students should have voted in the new system, but that fear and suspicion were behind their decision to maintain the status quo. Examining grades as a social practice and engaging in a debate about their usefulness and purpose in composition classes might help students to become better citizens of the university community. Examining grades as a social practice might also make the work of the writing course itself more meaningful to students and teachers.

Following this logic, our study's teacher would welcome questions such as those offered by her students and use them to explore with her students the motivations behind the questions and her own responses to them. She would encourage such questions as a means to explore the role of grades in their lives as teacher and students, including the particular and often idiosyncratic systems of "grading" they have encountered in the past, their feelings about those systems, and how they would or would not change those systems.

Grades are no simple matter; assessment is intricately intertwined with pedagogy. We need to resist believing that compromising about grading student writing will solve any or all of the problems. To ignore the vast implications of grading practices on teaching practices and the problems that arise when teacher and institutional visions of composition instruction conflict would be irresponsible. But it is also crucial to explore the implications of teaching and grading practices on students' construction of themselves as readers and writers. A cultural studies pedagogy encourages students and teachers alike to believe that reading and writing about grades in the classroom is meaningful cultural work. By examining the work that grades perform, and how they relate to other cultural texts that influence students' academic and life experiences, classroom participants might better understand the social and political meaning of what they learn throughout the university. An examination of how students are assessed in any given moment in history may lead to important discussions wherein they reflect on how they may be assessed in the future. Such knowledge could empower students and teachers alike to seek and then to enact change. That is, provoking students' interest in how grades have changed all of our lives might lead to an effort to shape their future impact. If we intend students to see writing and reading as potentially liberating activities, as the means of effecting real change in the world, then the dialogue about shared standards and grading must continue and evolve, in the offices of faculty and administrators, in scholarly publications, and, particularly, with our students in the classroom.

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APPENDIX A

The material below appeared on the department syllabi for English 100, English 101, and English 102 in the Fall and Spring semesters of the 1994–95 school year.

Each essay [is] to be graded according to the following criteria:

- A significant, logical, and clear central idea—**THESIS** 10%
- Clear and coherent **ORGANIZATION**—10%
- Adequate and logical **DEVELOPMENT**—30%
- Conciseness, logic, sentence variation, parallelism—**EFFECTIVENESS**—20%
- Grammar, usage—**MECHANICS**—30%
- TOTAL**—100%

The point conversion breakdown for the criteria used to evaluate the essay is as follows:

Thesis	Organization	Development	Effectiveness	Mechanics
10 PTS	10 PTS	30 PTS	20 PTS	30 PTS

Thesis	Organization	Development	Effectiveness	Mechanics
10 PTS	10 PTS	30 PTS	20 PTS	30 PTS
A=10	A=10	A=27-30	A=18-20	A=27-30
B=9	B=9	B=24-26	B=16-17	B=24-26
C=8	C=8	C=21-23	C=14-15	C=21-23
D=7	D=7	D=18-20	D=12-13	D=18-20
F=0-6	F=0-6	F=0-17	F=0-11	F=0-17

When evaluating an in-class essay, the instructor will subtract three (3) points for each major error and one (1) point for minor errors. For the out-of-class essay, the instructor will deduct four (4) points for each major error and two (2) for each minor error.

Major Errors

1. subject-verb agreement
2. fragments, other than stylistic
3. comma splice and fused sentences
4. major diction errors
5. serious errors in verb use and formation
6. case of pronoun, if serious
7. missing verb endings (-ed)
8. tangled sentences

Minor Errors

1. minor diction errors
2. pronoun-antecedent agreement
3. clarity
4. plurals
5. spelling
6. complex subject-verb agreement
7. apostrophes
8. capitals
9. dangling modifiers
10. punctuation
11. case of pronoun (“it is her” “between you and i”)
12. shifts in verb tense

13. adjectives and adverbs
14. subjective mood
15. awkward constructions

APPENDIX B SORTING OR RANKING PORTFOLIO

Portfolio Grading Scale

- A The writings in this portfolio demonstrate excellence in form, content, and style. They contain a good mix of general and specific statements, strong organization, transitions, and progression of thoughts. There are few or no mechanical errors present in the writings.
- B The writings in this portfolio are above average in form, content, and style. The papers are well focused, developed, and generally free from distracting errors. There is little use of cliché, and word usage is proper and appropriate. There are few mechanical errors in the writings.
- C The writings in this portfolio display average writing skills in the areas of form, content, and style. The papers are clearly focused, logical, and coherent, but may need more development. Sentence structure and vocabulary are adequate, but there is no sense of sophistication, and there are a few noticeable errors.
- D The writings in this portfolio do not meet minimum competency skill levels in the areas of form, content, and style. The papers are incomplete, superficial, and not focused. There is little sense of paragraph development or breakdown of thought into units. There are too many mechanical errors in the writings. The writer should schedule a conference with me to review the writings.
- E The writings in this portfolio reflect incompetence in writing. The writings are incomplete, incoherent, not focused, and contain a distracting number of major and minor errors. The writer must schedule a conference with me immediately.