



# Communication Studies

## Grading Standards

The UNC Communication Studies faculty is dedicated to the goal of student excellence. We hold that student excellence is embodied in two basic areas.

First, we believe that a liberal arts education is designed to prepare students for active, critical and sophisticated participation in the civic order. As such, excellence is engendered as students strive within a disciplinary framework both to understand and to engage the complex and diverse features of the political, economic and cultural landscape they inhabit.

Second, we believe that sophisticated and critical participation in the civic realm requires high levels of ability, knowledge and learning capacity—and that the (life-long) pursuit of these qualities demands discipline and commitment. As such, excellence is engendered as the student demonstrates via course assignments and projects increasing levels of achievement in the areas of knowledge, learning capacity and skill development.

One vital tool used to assist in the achievement of excellence is a clear outline of criteria and expectations concerning the texture and quality of COMM course assignments and projects. In essence, the assignment framework of the Communication Studies curriculum is the primary medium through which the student articulates his or her growing knowledge and insights concerning cultural symbolic activity. As such, the assignment framework is best designed in light of a clear and useful set of expectations.

Grading criteria and expectations are sketched out below. The outlines are compilations of COMM faculty ideas mixed with criteria developed by several different universities (*e.g.*, Harvard) concerning grading standards. In the spirit of Persig, we believe that quality and excellence transcend quantification and evaluative dialogue. Yet, we also believe that clear goals and clear steps to attain those goals are useful tools in the achievement of excellence. The basic elements of the criteria framework used in COMM are defined here:

- **Thesis:** the primary argument (or claim) of a work. The thesis organizes the work.
- **Structure:** the manner in which material is organized and sequentially outlined.
- **Evidence:** the material marshaled to support (or back-up) the claims of the work.
- **Analysis:** the critique designed to evaluate the legitimacy and quality of a work.
- **Sources:** the reference material employed as an information base for the project.
- **Style:** how ideas are worded; the language used to articulate one's ideas.

## **The Grade of “A”**

The completed assignment (or project) simultaneously:

- demonstrates extraordinary effort on the part of the student to achieve excellence
- is of superior (or advanced and exceptional) quality in every way.

### **1. The completed project demonstrates extraordinary effort to achieve excellence.**

Excellence demands extraordinary effort. Here, the student has pushed him/herself well beyond previous personal capacities. New landscapes of achievement potential are clearly being explored and mastered.

### **2. The project is of superior (or advanced and exceptional) quality in every way.**

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points of view, and demonstrates the beginnings of a commitment to reason carefully from clearly stated premises in a subject, as well as some sensitivity to important implications and consequences.

- B-level work displays sound reasoning and problem-solving within a field and works consistently at a competent level of intellectual performance.

**Thesis:** arguable but may be a bit conventional or uninteresting, or feature un-integrated parts; may be only implied, not stated early on; may not be argued throughout, disappears in places.

**Structure:** generally logical but either ambiguous in places (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable and undeveloped; few complications or considerations of counter-arguments; some

- The grade of C implies sound reasoning, yet there is some mixed thinking and performance within the domain of a subject and course, along with some development of a range of knowledge acquired through the exercise of thinking skills and abilities.
- C-level work is consistently clear, but is not very precise or well-reasoned at points; moreover, it does not display acute depth of insight or consistent competence. Basic terms and distinctions are learned at a level which implies the beginnings of, but inconsistent comprehension of, concepts and principles.
- The C-level student has internalized a few of the basic intellectual standards appropriate to the assessment of his/her own work in a subject, but demonstrates inconsistency in self-evaluation.
- The C-level student sometimes raises questions and issues, sometimes analyzes questions and problems clearly and precisely, recognizes some questionable assumptions, clarifies some concepts competently, inconsistently uses language in keeping with educated usage, sometimes identifies relevant competing points of view, but does not demonstrate a clear commitment to reason carefully from clearly stated premises in a subject, nor consistent sensitivity to important implications and consequences

**Thesis:** fair yet not very original or insightful; is un-integrated (*e.g.*, three unrelated prongs); only implied or not stated early on; not argued throughout, disappears in places. **.6he**

The D-level student rarely raises questions and issues, superficially analyzes questions and problems, does not

recognize his/her assumptions, only partially clarifies concepts , rarely uses language in keeping with educated usage, rarely identifies relevant competing points of view, and shows no understanding of the importance of a commitment to reason carefully from clearly stated premises in a subject.

The D-level student is insensitive to important implications and consequences.

D-level work displays poor reasoning and problem-solving within a field and works, at best, at a low level of intellectual performance.

## **The Grade of “F”**