

Student Name

Professor Stansell

ENG 101 Sec. 001

01/29/2015

Why Didn't I get an A?:

A Letter from your Teacher

I've been wondering lately why more of my students don't turn in papers that are correctly formatted and have all of the necessary parts. Some students persist in writing summaries or telling stories despite their best efforts to write textual analysis. One of the worst things in the world is to try your best just to have it shot down. Usually, writers can come up with reasons for writing how they want. Here are some excuses I've gotten this semester:

"I don't think length should be an issue, as long as there's good quality." "For titles, I usually just put the name of the thing I'm writing about." "My movie doesn't have a context, so my paper is more about background information." "I'm just going to address a general audience." "I got finished in five pages, so I didn't worry about writing a conclusion."

Essays are graded in terms of overall "fit" to the assignment, which I can't spell out specifically, and everyone seems to have an opinion on how to do this. This informative essay will tell you general guidelines to follow in order to score the maximum points on your paper.

Let's start at the top of the page. The title is both creative and specific, using the MLA convention of an attention-getting line, followed by a line or two of description. The header is ½ inch from the top of the page on the right, and consists of the student's last name and an automatic page number. The ID block is in the proper order, as shown, without variation. The first paragraph is like a hook to pulls me into the world of issues around your text. Everything works together to make the reader more interested. These elements are worth one point.

Next, the thesis paragraph contains sentences that assert an arguable proposition, or claim, about the text being analyzed. It is something specific that can be proven by looking at the text and its contexts. Good descriptions of your argument contain two parts: 1) your claim, and 2) a description of how the main evidence will be discussed. A good thesis is worth one point. Sometimes, one paragraph isn't enough to bring in all of the background that you need to set up your argument. Whether you use another paragraph or not, somewhere in the beginning of the paper is an explanation of your purpose in making to make this claim, and information about the audience, which are people you will refer to, and who care about your topic. A good sense of purpose and audience must be carried throughout the paper, and is worth one point.

As you think about how you will write five pages, consider that the difference between summary and analysis is that anyone can write a summary after viewing the text. Writing a compelling analysis often takes an insider's perspective into the world around the text. As you get into the body of your essay, you must use specific evidence from the "text" (quotations, paraphrases) to prove your point. Utilize summary sparingly, reserving it for glossing over important sections and to set up a context. Using evidence properly is worth one point. However, you can't just throw it out there and expect it to make sense. Your writing must be argumentatively sound, showing critical thinking and setting up your organization so that a reader can understand it. Your arguments must show that you considered outside texts and ideas from that world. Making solid arguments is worth one point. If you can't fill the required page length, no amount of reformatting or line skipping will make the paper into an A.

The next few points have to do with the skill that a writer exhibits. Writing well shows the audience that you care about the subject and them. So writers should make good choices of words, avoid repetition, and use the thesaurus to help when necessary. Good writing shows a command of imagery and an expression of personal style without stepping too much on the

reader's toes. This is worth one point. In order for your essay to conform to the genre it represents, your sentences must be structured with the grammar of edited American academic English. Just turn on the spelling and grammar checker to Formal settings and you will catch many errors. All sentences must have subjects and verbs, and they must agree with each other. Pick either the past tense or present tense and stick with it. This is worth a point. Improper comma, semicolon, and period usage exhibits careless editing, and distracts from your real message. Because of this, punctuation is also crucial, and is worth one point.

This message is served by your skillful writing of paragraphs with coherent tone and voice. The writing should flow easily from specific evidence to general ideas and have an internal structure that knows what good paragraph length is. Sentences should vary in length, using a good mixture of longer, more complex sentences to connect ideas, and shorter ones to make things stand out. This is worth one point. Your paragraphs also have to stick together well, and transition phrases help to bridge the gaps between ideas. The reader is able to shift focus from one paragraph to the next because you've set him up for the change. Good transitions also show the reader that you care, and can make a disconnected list of sincere statements into a compelling emotional journey. This is worth one point.

Finally, at the end of your essay, you must use an effective conclusion to wrap everything up. You probably don't have to sum up your argument again, but you could reassert the thesis more strongly and in new words. You can also evaluate the effectiveness of the "text" in its purpose, suggesting the implications of your textual analysis. Some combination of all or any of these makes a conclusion paragraph into a grand finale. This is worth one point. As an aside, this class is designed to make you think about how you write and give you time to change. Because of this requirement, all of the set-up work, including the worksheets, revisions, organizations, and two drafts are worth one point. Enjoy your writing, and good luck!