

Criteria for evaluation of essay exam answers:

The following are general criteria used for evaluating essay exam answers. This list is intended to give a general understanding of the factors taken into consideration in grading exam essays, but it is not considered definitive or all-inclusive. Various combinations of the criteria outlined may affect the final evaluation of the grade assigned. For more information, see the handout "Writing Essay Examinations."

Note: within each category, the degree to which these criteria are met will determine whether the essay receives a "+" or "-".

- A:** An "A" essay will show a thorough understanding of all of the appropriate thematic and factual elements of the question. Drawing on lectures, assigned readings, and other course-related materials, it will develop an interpretative thesis clearly and logically, with a sufficient number of specific examples to support the generalizations of that thesis. It will also establish a clear chronological framework by using specific dates wherever possible. (In some cases, that chronological framework may be fairly general, but an A essay will be as specific as possible.) It should present the information in such a way that the person reading it would be able to understand the key issues of the question without having to see the actual question. Similarly, the reader should be able to understand it clearly without any prior knowledge of the subject or any related ideas that may have been covered in class. An "A" essay assumes no knowledge of the subject on the part of the reader
- B:** A "B" essay will meet most of the criteria of an "A," essay, but will not be as fully developed in all areas. For example, rather than specific dates, chronological references will be to broader time periods (such as "nineteenth century," "early twentieth century," etc.) In some cases, all of the necessary factual material may be contained in a "B" essay, but it is not presented in a clear, logical manner.
- C:** A "C" essay will usually represent a students' general grasp of the key elements of the question, but does not develop them fully or clearly. Rather than chronological references, they usually have only broad references to historical categories ("the Roman Republic" (or "Roman Empire") "the Enlightenment," "the Napoleonic Era," "the Age of the Vikings," etc.), without any indication of the time frame for those eras. In some cases, there may be a great deal of factual information (the "shotgun approach"), but the interpretative elements are weak. Or there is not adequate indication of how the facts relate to the question. In other cases, the essay may contain only broad generalizations with few, if any, specific examples.
- D:** A "D" essay will usually be poorly organized, without sufficient thematic or factual elements to answer the question adequately. It will, however, show at least a basic understanding of the concepts or issues addressed in the question.
- F:** An "F" essay shows neither sufficient relevance to the question asked nor an understanding of the issues it addresses.