

Grading Criteria, Grading Checklist

These items are tied to the three-part structure used in this course from beginning to end. (Sometimes, the first assignment will be focused only on part One.) I'll sketch each part and indicate the weights I give to each as percentage of the total grade.

Part One is where you *describe the argument* in a piece of prose you have been given.

Describing means that in the face of temptations to endorse or quarrel with the argument, you just stuff it. Describing is in contrast with evaluation. No evaluation in this part. Description is not a simple process, and arguments are not simple either, so the course relies on a strategy for doing description. The strategy involves answering four questions, as follows:

- a. **What's the issue?** Give the issue as a **question on which people could disagree**. Find a neutral way to articulate it, as the question on which both the speaker and the speaker's opponents could agree.
- b. **What's the speaker's position?** There are various terms roughly synonymous with position: claim, conclusion, point, stand.
- c. **What support does the speaker offer** for her position? There are many different kinds of support, and the terms overlap but are not the same: evidence, reasons, insights, citing previous agreements, citing authorities, confirming examples.
- d. **What are the framing concerns**, the worries, who's the speaker (does she have some special point of view or expertise, what is she against, to whom is she speaking, for whom is she speaking)? I often call this Point of View, but don't let the literary association (3rd person limited or omniscient etc.) confuse you—it is mainly a reminder that arguments are given by persons, and a request you take note of who the speaker is and what she is doing in offering an argument.

That was simple. Too simple. It turns out that there's more to part one, in most cases. The more comes under the heading of issue, with five questions for clarifying the issue:

1. **What do the terms mean?** Are any of the words artificial or philosophically biased? Can the terms be understood in more than one way? (If the argument is *about* the meaning of a term, leave this for the section on support.)
2. **How's the issue arise?** What is the history or background of the issue?
3. **What are the possible answers?** Beware of binary questions, either-or alternatives, and be sure to articulate important qualifications or modifications when the question is legitimately an either-or question. Be sure to say what the speaker's opponents' alternative is.
4. **What's at stake?** What difference does it make which of the possible answers we endorse? What are the consequences of choosing one rather than another? What turns on this? So what?
5. **What issues are related?** Related, in one meaning, means that the answers to these other issues will be influenced by the answers we give on this particular issue.

Weight: Part One is required. You cannot pass the assignment with an essay which lacks a well-developed Part One. Issue, Position, Support, Point of View all have to be articulated.
40%

In **Part Two** you argue for yourself. Tell what the speaker should have said, and why. If you want to take a different position, opposing the speaker on the same issue, you may, and then provide support for that position. If you wish to modify the issue, then you need to justify that—that is, you need to say why the issue needs to be changed, why your way of articulating the issue is better, and then what your position on that revised issue is. We will work with other alternatives for this part as well.

Weight: 30%

Part Three involves imagination and more of your own argument, as well as remembering what's happened in discussion. In Part Three, you anticipate and articulate the best objections to your own arguments. If you are disagreeing with the speaker of the prose you've been given, then that speaker would probably have responses to the work you did in Part Two. If you are agreeing, then you need to think what the crucial criticisms of that argument are. If you are doing something else, think how someone might object in ways which might make you change your mind. In particular, show you know any objections which have been mentioned in class. The great temptation is to offer silly objections which you can sneer at. If the issue is a serious issue, then probably there are serious objections to your arguments. When correcting your essays, I will by reflex try to think of objections to your thinking—it may help if you try to predict my comments.

Weight: 30%

Checklist:

Issue given as a question, at appropriate level of abstraction, in neutral language:

Speaker's position, clearly given:

Complete and accurate statement of support offered by the speaker:

Relevant insights regarding speaker's point of view:

Issue clarification:
(not all are relevant in every case)
Meanings of terms?

How's it come up?

Possible answers?

Stakes?

Related Issues?

Your position clear, relevant, explained:

Your support clear, relevant, explained:

Objection(s) given are the strongest and are clearly stated:

Response to objections thoughtful, include supported evaluation:

(These are the default values, and will be adjusted when a particular piece is more crucial to the issue or when writers present original or strikingly put insights.)