

# Academic essay rubric

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This is a grading rubric an instructor uses to assess students’ work on this type of assignment. It is a sample rubric that needs to be edited to reflect the specifics of a particular assignment. Students can self-assess using the rubric as a checklist before submitting their assignment. This sample rubric can also be found under the Turnitin tool in Blackboard to facilitate online grading.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Edit the assignment requirements column, performance level descriptions in each box, and point values to align with a particular course assignment. Distribute the rubric to students when first introducing the assignment. Use the rubric to grade student work. To use the rubric in Blackboard, contact USC Blackboard support and [CET](http://cet.usc.edu/online-teaching/) for assistance. Also see the CET resource Tips for Designing Rubrics.

Table for the academic essay rubric

| Criteria | Excellent | Meets expectations | Approaches expectations | Needs improvement |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Thesis/Focus | Thesis and purpose are clear, closely match the writing task, and provide fresh insight. | Thesis and purpose are fairly clear and match the writing task. Thesis and purpose are somewhat original. | Thesis and purpose are somewhat vague and/or only loosely related to the writing task, and/or unimaginative | Reader cannot determine thesis & purpose and/or thesis has no relation to the writing task. |
| Organization | Fully supports thesis & purpose. Sequence of ideas is effective. Transitions are smooth and effective | Organization supports thesis and purpose. Transitions are generally appropriate. However, sequence of ideas could be improved | Some signs of logical organization in support of the thesis. Transitions are abrupt, illogical, and/or ineffective. | Unclear organization and/or organizational plan is inappropriate to thesis and/or no transitions. |
| Support | Substantial, logical, and concrete development of ideas. Assumptions are made explicit. Details are germane, original, and convincingly interpreted | Offers solid but less original reasoning. Assumptions are not always recognized or made explicit. Contains some appropriate details or examples | Offers some support that may be dubious, too broad or obvious. Details are too general, not interpreted, irrelevant to thesis, or inappropriately repetitive | Offers simplistic, undeveloped, or cryptic support for ideas; inappropriate or off-topic generalizations; faulty assumptions; and/or errors of fact. |
| Sources | Uses sources to support, extend, and inform, but not substitute for writer’s own development of ideas. Skillfully combines material from a variety of sources. Always conforms to style manual. | Uses sources to support, extend, and inform the writer’s own development of ideas. Appropriately uses quotes but may not always conform to required style manual. | Uses relevant sources but substitutes them for the writer’s own ideas. Quotations and paraphrases may be too long and/or inconsistently referenced. | Fails to use sources and/or overuses quotations or paraphrasing and/or uses source material without acknowledgement. |
| Style | Sentences are varied, complex, and employed for effect. Diction is precise, appropriate, using advanced vocabulary. Tone is mature, consistent, suitable for topic and audience. Adheres to required length. | Sentences show some variety & complexity. Uneven control. Diction is accurate, generally appropriate, less advanced. Tone is appropriate. Adheres to required length. | Sentences show little variety, simplistic. Diction is somewhat immature; relies on clichés. Tone may have some inconsistencies in tense and person | Superficial and stereotypical language. Oral rather than written language patterns predominate |
| Conventions | Essentially error free. Evidence of superior control of diction | Grammar and syntax are correct with very few errors in spelling or punctuation | Repeated weaknesses in mechanics and usage. Pattern of flaws. | Mechanical and usage errors so severe that writer’s ideas are difficult to understand |