

Upper School Composition Grade Qualities

A — (90-100%) - Excellent, brilliant writing. The writing is not rushed or hurried.

- Assignment:** The writing followed the prompt closely and with impressive thoroughness.
- Unity:** All evidence and discussion cohere around the same thesis.
- Introduction and Conclusion:** Both clearly hint to and reflect on the material, but do not introduce the bulk of material.
- Thesis Defense:** Exceptional and original thesis that provides insightful thoughts and is well-defended by evidence and explanation.
- Language:** The language is mature, the information and thoughts insightful, and the writing professional and removed with no personal references.
- Mechanics:** No grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors at all.

B — (80-89%) - Above-average writing.

- Assignment:** The writing followed the prompt well.
- Unity:** Most evidence and discussion cohere around the same thesis.
- Introduction and Conclusion:** A clear introduction and conclusion exist.
- Thesis Defense:** Thesis argues a point that could be proven or disproven and argues with strong evidence and explanation.
- Language:** The writing thoroughly covers the ideas, but may contain overly-formal jargon.
- Mechanics:** Few grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors.

C — (70-79%) - Good writing.

- Assignment:** Follows prompt.
- Unity:** Some evidence and discussion stick together around the same thesis.
- Introduction and Conclusion:** Adequate introduction and conclusion.
- Thesis Defense:** Adequate evidence and explanation support a generic thesis.
- Language:** Average word choice, or overly-conversational language.
- Mechanics:** More than a few grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors.

D — (60-69%) - Below-average writing.

- Assignment:** Barely follows prompt.
- Unity:** Very little evidence and discussion stick together around the same thesis.
- Introduction & Conclusion:** Little-to-no introduction or conclusion, or only a thesis.
- Thesis Defense:** Thesis not adequately explained or supported. No argument, simply a summary of events.
- Language:** Casual language, juvenile vocabulary, “bare-minimum-required” style.
- Mechanics:** Many grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors.

F — (-60%)

- Does not follow prompt.

Grammar/Punctuation Errors

- Tense** – Keep all verbs the same tense. If using past, stay in the past (e.g. “ate” and “was”) and do not switch to present (e.g. “eats” and “is”), or use ALL present.
- Quote Integration** – A quote cannot stand alone as its own sentence. It must be a part of a sentence of your own words.
- Hyphens** – Two-part words should be hyphenated. (See what I did there?)
- Colons/Semicolons** – Colons for quotes or further explanation. Semicolons to separate clauses.
- Fragment** – The sentence does not contain a subject and a predicate (a complete thought).
- Run-on/Comma Splice** – The sentence contains more than one clause (a subject and a predicate) without any connection (run-on) or with only a comma (comma splice).
- Commas** – Use in lists, after dependent clauses, setting off appositives and opening adverb clauses, dividing clauses in compound sentences.

Formatting Errors

- Heading** – Name/Number, teacher’s name, name of class, date (in that order), ala. MLA.
- Title** – Title one line below end of heading, one line above start of paper. Use no bolds, underlines, or italics, except italics for the title of the book. E.g. Beautiful Stranger: The Attraction of Mystery in *Pride and Prejudice*.
- Margins/Indents** – 1” margins on all sides, ½” indents at start of each paragraph & all block quotes
- Page Numbers** – Last name and page number in the top right-hand corner of each page
- Quotes/Citations** – All quotes are encased by quotation marks and end (after quote marks, before closing period) with the author’s name and page number in parentheses. E.g. “Nor mine, I trust, until I’m proven guilty” (Bolt 151). Commas before quotes. If pre-quote comments are a complete sentence, use a colon.
- Block Quotes** – Introduced by a colon, quote begins one line beneath, no quotation marks, indented ½” from the left margin, citation AFTER quotes’ end punctuation.
- Works Cited** – On a separate page, title centered, not bold or underlined, alphabetical list

Things to Avoid

- NA** – Not applicable. Avoid ideas unrelated to your topic and/ or assignment.
- Parentheses** – Use parentheses only for parenthetical citations.
- Passive Verbs** – When at all possible, use active verbs instead of passive ones. E.g. “Miss Smith teaches Jack” instead of “Jack is taught by Miss Smith.”
- Prepositional Endings** – Avoid ending a sentence with a preposition, if possible.
- 1st/2nd Person** – Avoid mentioning yourself (“I”, “me”) or the 2nd person (“you”)
- Referencing Paper** – Avoid mentioning your paper. E.g. “In this paper, I will...”
- Informal** – This language is too casual/ colloquial for academic writing.
- Contractions** – Avoid all contractions. E.g. don’t, won’t, shouldn’t, I’m, I’ve, etc.
- Split Infinitive/Verb** – Avoid placing adverbs between words in verb phrase/infinitives (e.g. “to carefully eat” should be “to eat carefully”; “was quickly walking” should be “was walking quickly”).
- Wordy** – Here many words say little. Find a simpler, more direct phrasing.
- Wrong Word** – Use a different, more precise word for this context.
- Pronoun** – Clarify to which noun the pronoun refers.
- Paragraph** – Begin a new paragraph when you begin a new topic, no more, no less.