***Essay Writing Guidelines***

The fundamentals of good writing can be sub-divided into four component parts; content, form, style and mechanics. Content refers to *what* you say. Form, style, etc., describe *how* you say it. An excellent paper demonstrates superior effort or accomplishment in all four categories simultaneously. Here is a brief catalogue of what to look for.

***Content***. The information in your paper, including your research, your reflections or analysis of the data, and so on, should be *accurate* and *relevant* to the question(s) at hand. It should be well documented and/or referenced. Factual errors, lengthy digressions on irrelevant (or barely relevant) items, or arguments that are unsupported by logic or evidence count against you in this category.

***Form*** refers to the organization of your paper. Every paper should have an *introductory paragraph* that indicates what is in store for the reader, and a *concluding paragraph* that ties together the various threads of argument or analysis it makes use of along the way. As far as possible, it should also be *free of excessive redundancy and repetition*.

***Style*** refers to the *clarity* and *coherence* of your writing. Avoid awkward, vague or elliptical sentences which seem to hint at sophistication or profundity. More often than not, they suggest that your ideas are not yet fully formed or articulated – that you have not processed them sufficiently to defend them well and are, therefore, hiding behind an impressive façade. When summarizing another person’s ideas or attitudes, do not repeat them verbatim for long but, instead, use brief quotes and skillful paraphrases to keep things lively.

***Mechanics*** refers to grammar, spelling and punctuation. To avoid unnecessary errors like these *proof read your paper several hours after it is finished*, or better yet, ask *someone else to proof read it for you*.

***Grading Scale***

***A (90-100)*** Excellent.This paper shows originality and a strong capacity for critical thinking. It is squarely on topic, contains no major factual errors, has been carefully proof read, and has very few (if any) grammatical or typographical errors. It is well organized and free of redundancy or repetition. The author has a firm grasp of the issues at hand, and, as a result, the central thesis or argument is both crystal clear and based on well-documented evidence and/or arguments that are cogent and persuasive. The author makes excellent use of the required texts and supplementary readings in making her case.

***B (80-89)*** Very good. The author shows a firm grasp of the issues, shows originality and a capacity for critical thinking, but the paper was not proof read properly, or contains significant factual errors, or fails to document sources or use supplementary research, etc.

***C (70-79)*** Good/average This paper covers the required reading and the overall subject matter competently, but suffers from repetition, redundancy, poor introductory or concluding paragraphs, absent or inconsistent use of references, citations, too many factual or typographical errors, etc., often and despite evidence of some originality and critical thinking. Alternatively, this may be an B paper that fails to meet minimum page length requirements, veers slightly “off course,” or does not really address the issues at hand.

***D (60-69)***  Below average. Same as above, but the content is weaker, the thesis sketchier, and there is very little evidence of supplementary research, critical thinking or originality of perspective. Alternatively, the paper may have some of the qualities of a somewhat better paper, but fails to meet minimum page length requirements and/or strays far from the questions or issues at hand.

***F (0-59)*** Unsatisfactory. No evidence of supplementary research, critical

thinking or originality. Moreover, this paper either fails to address some important issues, or does so only in an inaccurate, confused or confusing way.