



Step 9: Understanding Comments on a Graded Paper

Reviewing comments on a graded paper is one of the best ways to improve academic writing skills. Your instructors use comments to explain why you received a certain grade, and more importantly, to suggest how you can improve. It is important to read these comments, try to understand and learn from them, and then apply what you have learned to both the graded paper and to future ones. Use the worksheet on the reverse side to make your lists and notes.

Steps to Complete

1. Get in the right frame of mind. It can be hard not to take grades personally, but try to remember that it is your *writing* that is being critiqued, not you. The instructor is trying to help you learn, and most learning involves some mistakes. If you can think of it that way, the comments will be much less intimidating and more helpful.
2. Read ALL the comments on the paper.
3. Highlight or make a list of any comments you do not understand and learn how to fix them. You should ask your instructor or a Writing Center tutor for help with these.
4. Reread the comments that are clear to you and make two lists: (1) mistakes you made; (2) what you need to do to improve. In addition to talking to your instructor or a tutor, refer to your copy of *A Writer's Reference* for specific explanations and examples for how to correct these errors.
5. Once you understand all the comments and know how to correct them, use the graded paper as practice. Correct grammatical errors, rewrite sentences, add missing content, etc.
6. Before you write another paper, decide what you need to do differently and use the new skills you practiced. Be sure to allow plenty of time for your next paper. A good rule of thumb is to allow twice as much time as you think you'll need. Many of the errors for which students receive reduced grades on papers come from rushing through the writing process.

Areas of Concern

Many comments will be directed toward some of the areas below. If you are weak in certain areas, you can use the questions below to help you decide what you need to do better.

Content: Were the directions followed? Is there adequate, credible evidence? Is that evidence explained? Are the ideas fully developed? Is there anything missing?

Organization: Are the thesis and organization identifiable? Are the paragraphs well structured? Are there clear topic sentences for each body paragraph? Are there transitions? Are the introduction and conclusion effective?

Style/Tone: Are the tone, word choice, and style appropriate for the paper and the audience? Is the sentence structure interesting and varied? Do the words and phrases carry the intended meaning?

Mechanics: Are there many grammar, sentence, or spelling errors?

Format: Is the heading correct? Are there page numbers? Is there an appropriate title? Are the in-text citations and works cited page done accurately?



Graded Paper Worksheet

Use this sheet to make lists about the comments and your ideas for improvement. Then learn about items you do not understand and apply this new knowledge to your graded paper for practice.

In this box, list comments you do not understand.

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Mistakes made:

How to fix:

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In this box, list how you can improve each area.

Content:

Organization:

Style/Tone:

Mechanics:

Format:

***Remember that Writing Center tutors can help you understand your instructor's comments, but they cannot explain the grade you made on your paper. You will need to speak to your instructor directly for clarification.**