

GRADING RUBRIC FOR MIDTERMS AND FINALS: South Asian Women's Literature, ASIAN 220.05

When grading essays, I look at five components: CONTENT, ANALYSIS, ORGANIZATION and STRUCTURE, EVIDENCE and STYLE. In terms of CONTENT, I'm looking at how much you've written and what exactly it is that you're saying and that you've chosen to focus on. When considering ANALYSIS, I'm looking at how far you've pushed your literary analysis and how much consideration you are giving for literary tools such as symbolism and theme (as opposed to mere summary of story). An essay must be very well organized in order for its arguments to be effective, so to help you improve on this skill, I also look closely at the ORGANIZATION of your essay itself (i.e., the flow of ideas and the format of intro/body/conclusion) and at both your sentence and essay STRUCTURE. Finally, if your paper is of an advance level, I consider your writing STYLE, though this is of least concern to me.

Midterm/Final Essay Grade Breakdown:

CONTENT: 20%
ANALYSIS: 20%
ORGANIZATION: 10%
STRUCTURE: 10%
EVIDENCE: 10%

To be clear, the areas of CONTENT and ANALYSIS are ultimately more important than the other categories. In other words, my primary interest is in what you have actually written and what your actual arguments are. So those two areas – CONTENT and ANALYSIS – each receive 20 points, whereas the other areas only receive 10 points each.

Additionally, while I appreciate STYLE I never penalize students who are still developing their writing styles. Writing style does not figure into your grade.

Notes on CONTENT:

This is the heart of your essay. Content refers to the material you choose to put into your essay. In general, I would always advise students to begin with an outline and identify what major points/areas you want to include in your essay. When choosing content to discuss you should choose the clearest examples that prove your argument. Since all of you are still developing your writing abilities, I will always reward effort – so, the more content you write, the longer your paper, the better chances you have of receiving a higher grade.

Notes on ANALYSIS:

This is the point of writing academic essays – to develop our analytical and critical thinking skills. Analysis refers to a process in which you make meaning out of literature – and this is typically done using tools of literary analysis, such as theme, character, plot, image, symbol, etc. When crafting your analysis, you should identify the major argument or theme of your essay right away (in the introduction, in the thesis statement) and the rest of your essay should be an analytical exploration “PROVING” this major argument. In other words, it's always important to return to your main argument in each of your

paragraphs, and I would recommend explicitly connecting your points made in the body of your paper back to your main, thesis statement argument.

So, for example, if we are interested in the theme of casteism in The God of Small Things, we would identify that theme in the introduction's thesis statement and then develop our analysis of how that theme functions in the novel in the body of the essay.

Notes on ORGANIZATION:

Essay organization is a key component for success. In life, you may be asked at various times to make arguments – possibly at your job or in other arenas of your life. An organized argument is always the most effective one. So in this aspect of the paper, I am looking for essays with clearly defined parts – the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.

The introduction should INTRODUCE your major argument by providing a CONTEXT. That context could be a historical explanation or a sociological explanation. In other words, it's best if you can put your paper in a larger context to better situate your arguments.

The introduction should conclude with a THESIS STATEMENT – which is typically at the end of the introduction and is the sentence in which you present your major argument. While it is up to you on how to structure this thesis statement, it's sometimes helpful to provide both content and context: “In this essay, I'm looking at X, Y, and Z in order to explore A, B, and C.” This thesis statement tells me WHAT you're looking at in this essay and WHY you're looking at it.

The middle section of your paper is referred to as the BODY. This is where you will “prove” your major argument. It's important to organize these paragraphs effectively and clearly. Try to focus only on one major idea per paragraph. If your paragraph is two pages long, you probably have used too broad of a focus which disorganizes your argument and ultimately makes it weaker. Body paragraphs typically start with a sentence that identifies what the paragraph will be about; the rest of the paragraph works to prove that sentence's concept. As I mentioned in my comments on ANALYSIS, it's important to always connect your “proof” with the larger point in order to effectively craft your analysis in body paragraphs.

The last paragraph of your essay is the CONCLUSION. Please don't forget about this important part of the essay! It CONCLUDES your arguments, sometimes by returning to the thesis statement and “seeing it” in a new and comprehensive way.

Notes on STRUCTURE:

I used to grade structure and organization as one component, but now I separate them out. This is where I look at sentence and paragraph structure. Are your sentences phrased awkwardly? Do you employ transition statements between paragraphs to ensure a smooth construction? These are the aspects to pay attention to for this part of the grade. To improve upon structure in your writing, I recommend consulting a writing style guide, such as The Elements of Style, by Strunk and White.

Notes on EVIDENCE:

When making your arguments, you must “prove” them by providing EVIDENCE. In a literary essay, that refers to your use of quoted text from the novel. The best evidence are the best examples that prove

your argument. Students sometimes pick examples in the beginning of the book because they don't have enough time to construct and find proper evidence. I would encourage you to think of the novel as a whole and to use the best quotes you possibly can that prove your argument. You can find examples of evidence in my audio lectures when I read text out loud and analyze it for the class.

Please make sure that you are properly quoting from the novel – I don't have a preference for endnotes, footnotes, or parentheticals, but whatever you do, you should do it correctly and consistently. If you're using endnotes ONLY use endnotes; if you're using footnotes ONLY use footnotes.

IN CONCLUSION: Good luck! Some of you may know that I used to provide extensive feedback on student essays – unfortunately, with increases in student enrollments, it's impossible for me to do so now. But that doesn't mean that I am not reading your essays carefully! Please know that I am delighted to read your work – I know that you have spent time and energy crafting the best essay that you can, and I am so grateful for your hard work as I read your essay. My gratitude is reflected in your grade. Students in the past have expressed to me that they sometimes feel disheartened when they write essays for class – especially since they imagine that professors are uninterested in their work. Please know that I want to read your work and am very interested in what you have to say; I want to know your thoughts on these topics and I am proud of you for your efforts.

My advice to you as you begin to work on your essay would be to “shoot for the moon.” This is your chance to impress me with your brilliance and with your knowledge, so be kind to yourself: start early on the essay, use an outline, and write as much as you can! I usually grant higher grades to longer essays because I reward effort. I love reading long essays and am literally delighted whenever students go over the page limits – so don't worry if your paper is long! But it is a problem if your essay is short – especially if it is below the minimum page length. I have a note in the syllabus and also in the assignment prompt that states there is a penalty for papers that are less than minimum page length. Please refer to the assignment prompt for more information on that.

Finally, PLEASE do not plagiarize from the internet or from other sources or copy another student's work. Not only is it unethical and against school policy, but you will definitely lose me as a potential member of your professional network one day. It's not worth it. There are penalties for plagiarism listed in the course syllabus; please refer to that policy for more information.

I look forward to reading your essays and thank you so much for your hard work! Good luck!

Best wishes,
Professor Qidwai