When grading, I evaluate the words on the page. Although neither effort nor improvement is factored into the essay grade, writing does tend to improve through revision. Effort and engagement are accounted for in the seminar citizenship grade. Below are the common standards to which papers are held in the Writing Seminars. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference.

A paper in the A range demonstrates a high degree of command in the fundamentals of academic writing:

- It crafts a compelling, multilayered motive using multiple sources to demonstrate why a line of inquiry is interesting and significant;
- It makes innovative and generative methodological choices in dialogue with relevant sources;
- It engages varied, well-chosen, and properly-attributed evidence to contextualize, develop, and complicate the paper’s argument;
- It analyzes those sources insightfully—both individually and collectively—to elucidate for readers how the paper’s claims emerge from its evidence.
- These elements drive an interesting, arguable, manageable, and intellectually significant thesis;
- The paper enacts all these achievements with a progressive and reader-friendly structure, both within and across paragraphs.

A B-range paper contains all the elements required to make a complete academic argument:

- It establishes a functional, source-driven motive;
- It makes logical methodological choices in response to the relevant sources;
- It integrates enough credible, pertinent, and properly-attributed evidence to develop the paper’s argument;
- It represents those sources accurately and at times analyzes them effectively.
- These elements together ground an arguable thesis,
- And they guide a cogent structure.

Although a paper in the B range may also achieve some of the qualities of an A-range paper, it does not attain the high degree of command across all those elements required for an essay to rise into the A range.
A **C-range paper** shows awareness of the elements of an academic argument but falls short of accomplishing one or more of those elements in a full or complete way:

- it provides a motive, but one that is superficial or inadequately source-centered;
- it makes argumentative claims, but lacks a coherent methodology or awareness of (inter)disciplinary conventions;
- it invokes sources in support of those claims, but ones which are insufficient in terms of scope, credibility, or relevance;
- it references or describes those sources, but does not properly cite, contextualize, or analyze them;
- it offers a thesis, but one that is confusing, descriptive, or remains only implied;
- and its structure is incoherent or forced (such as in the five-paragraph essay).

Although a paper in the C range may also achieve some of the qualities of a B- or even A-range paper, one or more of the above shortcomings prevent it from rising into the B range.

A **D paper** (there is no D+ or D- at Princeton) may also show awareness of the elements of an academic argument but has one or more substantial deficiencies:

- it may lack a motive, methodology, or thesis;
- it may fail to invoke sources consistently or to integrate them adequately;
- and it may have an undeveloped or incomplete structure.

A paper in the D range may resemble a paper in the C range, in that it engages with the issues, topics, and source material required for an assignment, but it is distinguished by the degree to which it falls short of adhering to the basic conventions of academic discourse.

An **F paper** is similar to a D paper but is half the assigned length and addresses the assignment superficially.

A **0 paper** is less than half the assigned length and does not fulfill the basic expectations of the assignment. Unlike an F paper, a 0 does not count as successful completion of the assignment and puts the student in jeopardy of failing the course.