

Grade Levels

I won't always be able to tell you why your essays don't quite achieve the grades you want. Even after you respond well to feedback and make your essay grammatically correct, provide good sources, and make reasonable arguments, you might still not earn the highest grade. Writing beautifully and persuasively is more than a matter of following rules, and you may simply require more practice or more skill than can be achieved in a single semester.

Nobody wants to be told, "You just don't sound as if you know what you're talking about," or, "You spend so much time proving the obvious there's no room left for new insight," but that may be the truth of the matter, and it may be the unspoken reason your grade didn't improve as much as you hoped.

Following are some writing samples I hope will illustrate obvious differences in writing quality. The differences are enough to be worth a letter grade. These are relative values, of course, not absolutes. Not every writing course requires exactly this level of accomplishment for an A grade. Neither would the worst example necessarily earn a D grade in this course. Still, the comparisons should be helpful

I hope you'll feel inspired by the differences to strive for the most specific, most logical, most persuasive writing to achieve your goal—not better grades, but an enhanced ability to get what you want from people by persuading them.

I don't know any better way to demonstrate the difference between essays that earn different grades than to provide examples like this.

A Grade	B Grade	C Grade	D Grade
<i>Reasonable claims, nicely transitioned to guide reader through a persuasive argument</i>	<i>Unconnected but reasonable declarations</i>	<i>Poorly connected unclear or contradictory claims</i>	<i>No clear claims</i>
<p>The “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for gays enlisting in the army is just one example of the discriminatory laws that deny freedom of speech and expression to the homosexual community. Overturning that wrongheaded legislation as unconstitutional was a good first step toward awarding gays the equal rights a majority of Americans favor for them. It’s time for our government to stand up to religious zealots who oppress sexual minorities and to pass humane laws that grant all citizens their constitutional freedoms, such as the right to choose a spouse.</p>	<p>Denying same sex couples the right to marry is discriminatory. The “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for gays enlisting in the army was an example of an unconstitutional rule because it took away the rights of freedom of speech and expression from the homosexual community. A majority of Americans favor gay marriage because it treats all citizens equally. Although religious groups may be against it, the government should make laws based on how the majority believes.</p>	<p>A large percentage of American couples are same-sex couples. If heterosexual couples have the right to marry, then homosexual couples should have that right too. When the Army wanted to have a policy about “don’t ask, don’t tell,” they should have enforced that for heterosexual soldiers too and not just homosexuals because if one group has the right to express itself, then every group should have that right too. A majority of Americans favor gay marriage except for some very conservative religious groups who may be against it. We are a democracy that’s based on majority rules, so if a majority of Americans want equality for homosexuals, then that should be the law of the land for this great nation.</p>	<p>A large percentage of Americans are homosexuals, or at least they’re willing to say they are. Nobody should be allowed to tell them that they can’t serve in the Army if they’re brave enough to go to war, so it’s not fair to make them admit to being gay because it’s not relevant to their ability to serve as soldiers. The Army’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy would probably not be passed by a majority of Americans because most Americans know somebody who is gay and they don’t have prejudice against them. The religious groups don’t like “don’t ask, don’t tell” because they think if gay soldiers are allowed to be in the Army, then who can say whether they would create problems for the other soldiers? And not just whether they would be brave enough to be in combat; we have to wonder how they would behave when there was no actual fighting.</p>