**Holistic Grading Criteria**

These evaluative criteria were developed by [Dr. David Barndollar](http://barndollar.net/). The same five concerns are addressed at each grade level:

* quality of ideas
* development and organization
* language and word choice
* mechanics, and style

**A Grade** - Demonstrates unusual competence:

- an ability to avoid the obvious and thus gain insights that are individual and often illuminating

- a capacity to develop ideas flexibly and fluently, yet with control and purpose

- a special concern for the bon mot, even if it entails coining a word that the language does not provide

- an ability to use punctuation rhetorically, using it for effect as well as for clarity

- a willingness to be inventive with words and structures in order to produce a clearly identifiable style, even though at times the efforts may be too deliberate or may fall short of the writer’s intentions

**B Grade** - Demonstrates competence:

- an ability to absorb ideas and experience and to interpret them meaningfully in a context of the writer’s own conception

- a capacity to develop an idea with a clear sense of order

- a capacity to draw upon words adequate to express the writer’s own thoughts and feelings

- an ability to use mechanics as an integral part of the meaning and effect of the prose

- a capacity to consider alternate ways of expression as a means of making stylistic choices possible

**C Grade** - Suggests competence:

- a tendency to depend on the self-evident and the clichéd and thus for the writer to write uninformative discourse

- a tendency either to make the organization obvious or to write aimlessly without a plan

- a limitation in the range of words and thus a dependence on the clichés and colloquialisms most available

- an ability to use mechanics correctly or incorrectly in proportion to the plainness or complexity of the style

- a general unawareness of choices that affect style and thus an inability to control the effects a writer may seek

**D Grade** - Suggests incompetence

(F: Demonstrates incompetence)

- a tendency to exploit the obvious either because of a lack of understanding, inability to read, failure to grapple with a topic, or in many instances a lack of interest; substance of essays ranges from superficial to barren

- a tendency to wander aimlessly because of a lack of overall conception or in some instances to have a semblance of form without the development that makes the parts a whole

- a tendency to play safe with words, using ones the writer ordinarily speaks or the ones the writer can spell, placing obvious limits on variation of expression

- a frequent inability to make careful distinctions between periods, commas, and semicolons, although some writers in these categories can write correct sentences if they keep structures simple

- either a tendency to write highly convoluted sentences that are close to the rapid associations of our thoughts before we straighten them out or a tendency to play safe by avoiding the sentence elements that invite error (introductory modifiers, embedding, coordination, and various other sentence-combining techniques)