### Senior Seminar

**History 4820 • Section 10 (31425) • Spring 2021**

**T/Th, 11:00 – 12:15, 222 Central Classroom Bldg.**

Dr. Shelby M. Balik • *office hours*: by appointment • sbalik@msudenver.edu

If history were only about “what happened,” it would be easy to write. But however historians strive to portray the past definitively and objectively, their work is subject both to available primary sources and the prevailing discourses of their own times. In this course, we will examine the practice of history from two different angles. First, we will consider historiography – the “history of history” – by exploring the rise of the historical profession and the central philosophies and debates that have driven the discipline. Second, we will explore the nuts and bolts of doing historical research and writing. And finally, we will weave all of that together by doing history ourselves; by the end of the semester, each student will produce a polished and substantial work of original research and analysis. This class will allow students to tackle a broad range of topics by using different kinds of sources and methods. In doing so, you will understand through experience how widely divergent theories and methodologies have guided historians’ efforts to reconstruct the past.

**Required Readings:** The following books will be available at the Auraria Bookstore (bargain-hunters should also try the selection of used books on Amazon.com and Bookfinder.com, but make sure you get the right editions). I have also placed copies on reserve at the library.

Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* (2010)

Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History* (2017)

Michael J. Salevouris and Conal Furay, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*, 4th ed. (2015)

The following book is recommended but not required:

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (2007)

**Assignments, Grading, and Course Policies:** The course requirements and their value toward your grade are as follows. *You must complete all of these components in order to pass.*

Attendance and participation: 15% Preliminary paper assignments: 30%

Timeline exercise: 5% Final paper: 50%

*Attendance policy:* I expect regular attendance and will take roll. Everyone is allowed two “byes” – an unexplained absence – in the class. After that, any absences – except in the case of legitimate and documented emergencies, medical or otherwise – will detract from the attendance/participation portion of your grade. You are responsible for making up the work you miss during any absence, excused or otherwise.

Classes will generally include a combination of discussion and student presentation. Your level of preparation and participation will both improve the quality of class meetings and boost your participation grade. It should go without saying (but often doesn’t) that when you attend class, you will refrain from disruptive behavior, including (but not limited to) talking amongst yourselves, reading the newspaper, or texting.

*Preliminary paper assignments*: You will have a series of assignments intended to help you progress through the writing and research process. These will include a topic proposal, annotated bibliographies of primary and secondary sources, a section draft, and a rough draft, which will represent the complete outline of your paper (no sections missing) and will incorporate your primary and secondary research. Together, all of these assignments will count as 30% of your grade. *You must complete each step before moving on to the next*. This means that late work can have a domino effect by preventing you from completing (and earning credit for) subsequent course assignments. Don’t fall into that trap.

*Final paper*: Your final paper will be a (roughly) 20-page work of original research. Your project can cover any place or chronological period (barring recent decades, which we cannot analyze historically yet), but it must take up a historical question and use historical research methods to explore that question. I expect that this work will represent your best and most polished writing and thinking, make an analytical argument and support that argument though a well-organized analysis, make extensive use of primary sources, and include some historiographic discussion of the relevant scholarship. Over the course of the semester, you will receive more information on the paper assignment. *Your final paper must be submitted to Safe Assign and to me in hard copy to receive credit.*

*Deadlines:* All papers are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise noted. Late papers will be graded down one-third of a grade (A to A-, etc.) for every day they are late, starting after the beginning of class. Papers will not be accepted late or via e-mail, except with a valid excuse (medical or family emergency, etc.) AND prior approval from me.

**Other course guidelines and policies:**

*Cheating and plagiarism*: The first offense will result in a zero on the assignment, and the second will result in failure in the course. If you are unsure of what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, I strongly encourage you to check with me *before* you hand in your assignment. Please also note that any student who cannot or will not produce the notes, outlines, and other preparatory work for his or her paper will be considered guilty of cheating or plagiarism and subject to the same penalties. The policy in this class is quite simple and is as follows. In the first documented instance of academic dishonesty (as described in the University guidelines, linked below), the student will receive a zero on the assignment. In the second instance, the student will fail the class. All code of conduct violations will be reported.

*Metro State’s Academic Integrity Statement*: "As students, faculty, staff and administrators of Metropolitan State University of Denver, it is our responsibility to uphold and maintain an academic environment that furthers scholarly inquiry, creative activity and the application of knowledge.  We will not tolerate academic dishonesty.  We will demonstrate honesty and integrity in all activities related to our learning and scholarship.  We will not plagiarize, fabricate information or data, cheat on tests or exams, steal academic material, or submit work to more than one class without full disclosure."

For more information on academic dishonesty, see <https://www.msudenver.edu/deanofstudents/studentconduct/academicintegrity/>

Students are responsible for full knowledge of the provisions and regulations pertaining to all aspects of their attendance at MSU Denver, and should familiarize themselves with the policies found in the MSU Denver Catalog: [*MSU Denver Catalog*](http://catalog.msudenver.edu/).For more information and recent updates, go to the CLAS website: <https://www.msudenver.edu/las/>

The College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences is committed to, and cares about, all students. To help you manage personal challenges and basic needs security, the university offer several resources. Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (303-615-0220 or 303-615-0423), the Gender Institute for Teaching and Advocacy (303-615-2052), or our CLAS office (303-615-0995 or 303-615-1301) for support.

*Special Needs*: Students who need accommodations – for disability, religious observance, military service, or any other reason – should let me know within the first two weeks of class. Those with a documented disability should contact the Access Center to arrange for accommodations. A full statement on accommodations covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act is available on Canvas, in the “Syllabus and Policies” folder.

**Weekly Schedule**

*(subject to change)*

Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are available in the weekly modules on Canvas.

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**Week One: January 19-22**

*Readings*: \* *The Onion* on historians

 \* Peter N, Stearns, “Why Study History?” *American Historical Association* (2006)

 \* Karin Wolf, What Naomi Wolf and Cokie Roberts Teach Us about the Need for Historians,” *Washington Post* (June 2019)

\* Daniel Immerwahr, “History Isn’t Just for Patriots,” *Washington Post* (December 2020)

\* John Fea, “What do Historians Do?” and “In Search of a Usable Past,” from *Why Study History: Reflecting on the Importance of the Past* (Baker Academic, 2013)

\* Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Good Day, Columbus,” from *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995)

*Dangerous Games,* introduction and chapters 1-2

*The Methods and Skills of History*, chapters 1-2 (readings only – don’t do the exercises)

January 19: Introductions

 History: Why should we care?

 January 21: The politics of doing history

**Week Two: January 25-29**

*Readings*: *Thinking About History*, introduction and chapters 1-2

 *Dangerous Games*, chapter 3

 *The Methods and Skills of History*, chapter 7 (readings only – don’t do the exercises)

 \* Jeremy D. Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net* (Oxford, 2016), chapter 4

January 26: Old school history

January 28: Library research workshop: bring a device you can use for online research in class

**Week Three: February 1-5**

*Readings*: *Thinking About History,* chapter 3, 5 (we’ll cover chapter 4 later)

 *Dangerous Games,* chapter 3-4

 \* Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net* (Oxford, 2016), chapter 5

February 2: Challenging the canon

February 4: The postmodern mind

**Week Four: February 8-12**

*Readings*: *Dangerous Games*, chapters 5-6

 \* Michael D. Hattem, “The Historiography of the American Revolution: A Timeline” (Explore this website, which we’ll use in an assignment soon.)

**CONFERENCES INSTEAD OF CLASS – SIGN UP FOR YOUR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES WITH ME TO DISCUSS YOUR IDEAS FOR PAPER TOPICS.**

\*\*\* **TOPIC STATEMENTS DUE MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15 \*\*\***

**Week Five: February 15-19**

*Readings*: *Thinking About History*, chapters 4 and 6

 *Dangerous Games*, chapters 7-8, conclusion

 \* Gregory Stiverson, “The Activist Archivist: A Conservative View,” *Georgia Archive* 5, no. 1 (January 1977): 4-14.

 \* Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net* (Oxford, 2016), chapter 6

February 16: History Wars

February 18: Workshop: presentation of topics (plan to talk for a few minutes and field questions)

**Week Six: February 22-26**

*Readings*: *The Methods and Skills of History*, part IV and chapter 8 (not the exercises – just the readings)

\*Anthony Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing* (Wiley- Blackwell), chapter 7

 \* Selected historiographic essays from Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now* (Temple, 2011)

 \* Browse some of the articles in the “Guides for Reading and Writing History” module on Canvas

February 23: Fields of history and historiography

February 25: Workshop: how to read and use secondary sources (bring one of your secondary

 sources – book or article – to class)

**Week Seven: March 1-5**

*Readings*: *The Methods and Skills of History*, chapters 10-11 (not the exercises – just the readings)

 \* Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing*, chapters 5 and 8

March 2: Timeline assignment presentations (at least one member of the group should post the timeline link to Canvas by the end of the day)

March 4: Workshop: how to read and use primary sources (bring one of your primary sources to

 class)

**\*\*\* ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 5 \*\*\***

**Week Eight: March 8-12**

*Readings*: *The Methods and Skills of History*, chapters 3-5 (not the exercises – just the readings)

 \* Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, “What Does it Mean to Think Historically?” *AHA Perspectives* (January 2007)

March 9: Historical thinking

March 11: Developing a historical argument (Prepare a paragraph-length statement of your argument as it stands right now – don’t worry if it’s still rough. These are for workshopping in class and will not be graded.)

**\*\*\* ANNOTATED LIST OF FIVE PRIMARY SOURCES DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 12 \*\*\***

**Week Nine: March 15-19**

*Readings*: \* Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Harvard, 1997), introduction

 \* Danny Postel, “Did the Shootouts over ‘Arming America’ Divert Attention from the Real Issues?” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 2002)

 \* Joyce Lee Malcolm, “Disarming History,” *Reason* (March 2003)

 \* Jerome L. Sternstein, “Historical Fraud and the Seduction of Ideas,” *History News Network* (2002)

 \* “Historians on the Hot Seat,” *History News Network*

March 16: The endnote: powerful tool and protective device

March 18: Workshop: Xtreme Endnotes! (I know, I know. Just go with it.)

**Week Ten: March 22-26 – SPRING BREAK**

**Week Eleven: March 29 - April 2**

*Readings*: *The Methods and Skills of History*, chapters 6, 12, and 13 (not the exercises – just the readings)

 \* Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), introduction

 \* Judith Walzer Leavitt, “‘Typhoid Mary’ Strikes Back: Bacteriological Theory and Practice in Early Twentieth-Century Public Health,” *Isis* 83, no. 4 (December 1992): 608-29

 \*William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): 1347-76.

March 30: Workshop: Kinds of historical writing

April 1: Telling stories

**\*\*\* SECTION DRAFT DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 2 \*\*\***

**Week Twelve: April 5-9**

*Readings*: None – work on your papers.

**NO CLASS – ALLOTTED TIME TO WRAP UP RESEARCH AND WRITING ROUGH DRAFTS.**

**Week Thirteen: April 12-16**

*Readings*: None – work on your papers.

April 13: No class (work on your rough drafts).

April 15: Peer review of rough drafts (Note: ideally, we will do peer review in class. If the COVID situation forces us to meet virtually, we will meet in Teams and you will work in break-out rooms with your peer review partner to exchange and discuss drafts. Marked-up drafts and peer review forms will be due back to me *and* your peer review partner at the end of those meetings.

**\*\*\* ROUGH DRAFTS OF FINAL PAPERS DUE APRIL 15. SUBMIT THEM IN TO ME IN CANVAS AND BY EMAIL OR GOOGLE DOCS TO YOUR PEER REVIEW PARTNER. \*\*\***

**Week Fourteen: April 19-23**

*Readings*: None – work on your papers

**CONFERENCES INSTEAD OF CLASS – Sign up for your individual paper conference with me during the week of April 19-23.**

**Week Fifteen: April 26-30**

**NO CLASS – ALLOTTED TIME TO WRAP UP RESEARCH AND WRITING ROUGH DRAFTS.**

**Sign up for a presentation date for week 16.**

**Week Sixteen: May 3-7**

*Readings*: None – work on your papers

May 4: Final paper presentations (plan to talk for about 10-15 minutes)

May 6: Final paper presentations (plan to talk for about 10-15 minutes)

**\*\*\* FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, MAY 7. \*\*\***

**Senior Seminar**

**Schedule of Assignments**

*Any assignment marked with an asterisk (\*) is considered a preliminary paper assignment. Taken together, these assignments are worth 30 percent of your grade, although each assignment is weighted differently within that 30 percent total. The point value for each of these assignments indicates how it is weighted. You must submit and pass each preliminary paper assignment before you are authorized to submit the next one in the list (late deductions will apply if you have not completed an assignment because you have not completed or passed the previous one).*

**\* Paper topic conferences** (week of February 8-12): You will sign up for a meeting time to discuss possible topics and strategies for developing your ideas. Come prepared with concrete ideas for topics. (10 pts.)

**\* Topic statement** (due Monday, February 15): You should turn in a long paragraph sketching out the topic you plan to explore, the kinds of primary and secondary sources you expect to find, and what big points you expect to make. Your topic statement should demonstrate that you have thought in specific ways about how you will proceed with this project. (15 pts.)

**Timeline exercise** (due Tuesday, March 2): Collaborating with a group, you will create a timeline to explain the historiography of a field of history, using Michael Hattem’s timeline of the historiography of the American Revolution as a model. You will present these timelines in class on October 2, but you should work on it (via shared Google spreadsheets) well in advance. Although this exercise will likely have little direct connection to your papers, it will help you think about historiography, which will help you write your final paper.

**\* Annotated bibliography** (due Friday, March 5): You will turn in a list of seven peer-reviewed secondary sources (scholarly books or journal articles), each of which you will annotate with a paragraph. The paragraph should explain the following: the main argument of the source, how it will support your research into your topic, and how the author of the source situates it historiographically. In other words, use the introduction and the footnotes to explain what scholarly questions the author is exploring, and what works s/he is responding to or using to build the argument and interpretation of the work in question. If done correctly, you should expect to use parts of your annotations in your final paper – either in the introduction, the body, or the footnotes (or, more likely, all of the above). This assignment will be based on a *working bibliography*; in other words, you should not assume that you are done with your secondary research when you turn in this assignment. (35 pts.)

**\* Annotated list of five primary sources** (due Friday, March 12): You should turn in a list of at least five primary sources that you have located and will use in your paper. Include bibliographic information. For each source, you should write a brief (3-4 sentence) description to explain what it is, why it’s relevant, and how you will use it in your paper. (25 pts.)

**\* Section draft** (due Friday, April 2): This assignment has three main parts. First, you will prepare a draft of a section of your paper (about 3-5 pages). Ideally, this would be the part of your paper for which you have your research pretty far along (not the introduction). Second, you will include an outline that shows how and where the section you’ve drafted fits into the paper. This need not be a paragraph-by-paragraph outline, but it should be fairly specific, and it should show analytical structure. Finally, should include your main argument, sketched out in a paragraph. You need not prepare the entire introduction, but you should at least submit a current thesis statement. Hand this assignment in by e-mail. (50 pts.)

**\* Rough draft** (due Thursday, April 15): This draft should be a reasonably complete effort. It should include all the of the sections of your paper, take a good-faith stab at developing your main points, and incorporate your full range of primary and secondary evidence. It should be close to the length of the final paper assignment, and you should use correct citations. Do the best work you can at this stage of the process, because the more complete this draft is, the more useful my comments will be in helping you polish the final paper. Also, the more effort you devote to this draft, the fewer revisions you will likely have to do for your final draft. (100 pts.)

**\* Peer review** (completed on Thursday, April 15): Peer review of a classmate’s rough draft is required and part of your grade. You are not expected to offer the same insights as a teacher or professor (who would be trained and experienced in the art of grading). However, you should be thorough and thoughtful, you should address the main areas in the peer review guide, and you should be able to offer helpful advice and ask useful questions. Submit your peer review forms and the draft marked up with your comments both to the author and to me. (15 pts.)

**\* Rough draft conferences** (week of April 19-23): Sign up for a Teams meeting slot to discuss your draft. You will get your draft back with my comments during your conference. You must attend your conference to get your draft back and get the go-ahead to work on your final paper. (10 pts.)

**Final paper** (due May 7): These papers should represent your best work and most polished writing and analysis. You will be graded on the quality of the writing, the sharpness of your argument and analysis, the clarity of your organization, and your use of primary and secondary evidence. The final paper should be about 20 pages long, with citations (preferably footnotes) in the current Chicago Manual of Style format, and a full bibliography. You will give a brief (5-minute) presentation on your paper on May 4 or 6 in class.

**Senior Seminar**

**Writing Tips**

**We will, of course, talk a lot about writing in this class. But really, an excellent paper comes down to the following:**

***Argument:*** Your paper must have a clear, analytical argument,in the form of a thesis statement and sustained throughout the paper. Your thesis statement should appear toward the end of your introduction. It must make some sort of historical argument, which you will then support with evidence in the rest of your paper. Think of your thesis statement as answering a “how” or “why” question rather than a “what” or “who” question – in other words, it should suggest an interpretation rather than a description. Some examples:

 *Weak thesis (C or D paper):* "This paper will discuss how African Americans' legal status changed

 in the decades after World War II." [*Describes the topic but makes no argument.*]

*Somewhat better (B paper):* "African Americans' legal status improved dramatically in the decades

 after World War II." [*Suggests an argument but not the reasoning behind it.*]

*Much better (A paper):* "African Americans' legal status improved dramatically in the decades after

 World War II, partly due to improved economic opportunities and growing sympathy

 among whites, but even more due to mounting activism by blacks themselves." [*States*

 *a clear argument, and summarizes the reasoning behind it.*]

Beyond the thesis statement, you should use your topic sentences to reinforce and support your argument. Think of each topic sentence as a mini-thesis statement that makes an analytical point about some piece of your overall argument.

***Organization and structure*:** Develop your argument with clearly stated points, each of which builds logically on the points that preceded it and contributes a crucial piece to the overall argument. Prior to writing, develop an outline that breaks the overall argument down into two or three building-block points that work logically together. These building blocks will be the basis for your paragraphs.

*Weak organization (C or D paper)*: Paragraphs have no logical organization or relationship to each other and lack topic sentences that support the overall argument. Paragraphs have no apparent arguments or topics holding them together, but rather seem to start and stop at random points. There may be not true topic or concluding sentences.

*Somewhat better (B paper):* Paragraphs have clear topics, but the sequencing of topics may not make sense (for example – random chronological order, when the topic suggests an analysis of change over time), and topic sentences do not offer analytical points to support the main argument. Transitions may be lacking, abrupt, or unclear. Paragraphs may lack concluding sentences.

*Much better (A paper)*: Each paragraph has an analytical topic sentence that supports the thesis statement, evidence and analysis that supports the topic sentence, and a clear concluding sentence that wraps up the main idea. Transitions (which appear with the topic sentences, not the concluding sentences) as smooth and logical. Paragraph topics build logically from one to the next.

***Primary and secondary evidence***: I cannot stress enough that these papers are intended to give you a chance to think and write like historians – and that means that you *must use evidence*. You must include *primary evidence* (evidence from the time or events you’re discussing) and *secondary evidence* (writings based on primary research) to establish *historical context* (background information) in order to craft and present a historical argument. Without evidence, the paper is not a historical analysis – it’s just an opinion piece. Evidence can include quotes (brief quotes from primary sources only, please), facts, statistics, anecdotes – anything that helps support your argument AND that you can document. Using primary evidence involves careful reading *and* writing, so leave yourself plenty of time for these tasks.

*Reading:* To use evidence effectively, you should read your documents (along with assigned reading in *Of the People*) with the following questions in mind:

• What is the subject of core issue of the documents?

• Who created the documents, when were they created, and under what circumstances? How did the creators relate to the events or people being discussed (as an eyewitness, secondhand source of information, etc.)?

• What was the documents’ wider historical *context*? How might that context have influenced the author(s)?

• What do you know (or what can you infer) about the authors’ social positions (class, race, gender, level of education, occupation, etc.). What about the authors’ political orientations or biases? How might this background have shaped their perspectives?

• Who was the intended audience for the documents?

• Why did the authors create these documents – did they intend to persuade people? If so, of what?

• Based on all of the above, how reliable are these primary sources? What can we accept as fact, and what must we be suspicious of? Keep in mind that even a very biased source can be a valuable one, but we have to be aware of that bias as we analyze it.

*Writing*: Part of using evidence effectively means incorporating it into your writing in ways that strengthen your argument rather than distracting (or detracting) from it.

• *Quoting*: When you quote from a source, you must use quotation marks to indicate those portions that you are quoting. You should reproduce the words exactly and use citations to indicate from where they came. **Quote ONLY primary sources** (that is, sources from the time you are writing about that serve as evidence in your paper). You may quote from a secondary book or article, but only if the portion you are quoting comes from a primary source (so you might, for instance, use a quote from George Washington that appears in a book, but you should not quote the author of that book, who is writing about George Washington.). The reason: when you quote the author of a secondary source, you are letting that person do the historical thinking and analysis for you. In these assignments, *you* must do that work yourself. (There is an exception to this rule: when you are directly engaging a historian’s argument, you may quote the historian to advance your point. But you should still rely on primary evidence to critique that argument, and you should not use secondary quotes as a stand-in for your own analysis.)

• *Paraphrasing*: When you paraphrase, you use someone else's idea but explain it in your own words. You must indicate whose idea it is, just as you would for a direct quotation. You should not, though, use the original author's words; you must rephrase it in your own words. If you are paraphrasing, you may use ideas or arguments that historians present in their secondary works, as long as you give credit and synthesize these points in your own argument.

• *Citing your sources*: You should cite all evidence that is not common knowledge. This includes quotes, little-known facts and anecdotes, and statistics, along with any paraphrasing or reference to someone else’s ideas. You will not be penalized for excessive citation, so if you are in doubt, cite it. Either footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical citations (author and page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence) will do. You need not include a bibliography unless you use a source outside of class material (which is not expected). Citing sources properly is an important matter of academic integrity. If you paraphrase or quote another person's ideas without acknowledgment, you are plagiarizing. This is illegal, unethical, and grounds for a failing grade. Don't do it.

What should all of this look like in your paper? I will consider use of evidence as follows:

 *Weak (or no) use of evidence (C, D, or F paper)*: The paper includes no primary evidence and little or no reference to the assigned primary documents. The paper might mention or even quote the primary documents, but because there is no historical context, the author inaccurately misinterprets the meaning or significance of the evidence, or misses key pieces of information. Papers that include plagiarized text receive an automatic zero.

 *Somewhat better (B paper)*: The paper includes insufficient primary evidence. Some of the primary evidence supports the argument, but other examples may be poorly chosen, or the paper might simply rely on quotes with little context or analysis (letting quotes stand for themselves with no further discussion, for example). Formatting of quotes is awkward or grammatically incorrect (for example, floating quotes with no transitional phrases to link prose to quotes). The paper might have entire paragraphs without primary evidence.

 *Much better (A paper)*: Every paragraph (possibly except the introduction and conclusion) contains primary evidence. Primary documents are properly quoted, so that quotes and prose combine to form complete sentences. Quotes support but do not replace analysis; rather, analysis explains the quotes in proper context (derived from secondary evidence). Secondary evidence is paraphrased rather than quoted. All evidence works to support the broader argument as well as the points in each paragraph.

***Style*:** I will not grade you on style alone, but good writing is necessary to communicate your ideas.Therefore, quality of writing will figure into your grade. Get to the point, use clear wording, and avoid awkward phrases and sentences. Steer clear of overly formal or informal prose (for example, unnecessarily complicated or elaborate language, colloquialisms or slang, contractions, etc.). Use correct grammar and spelling. I highly recommend that you read your prose aloud to catch awkward or incorrect phrasing.

 *Weak writing (C or D paper)*: The paper either uses slang and inappropriately informal language, or it uses overly formal and unnecessarily wordy language. There are numerous problems with word choice, conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and awkward phrasing. The mechanical problems are significant enough to obscure the paper’s argument and distract the reader.

*Somewhat better (B paper)*: This paper has many of the same problems as a C paper, but they will not be significant enough to distract from the overall argument. The weaknesses in writing are less universal and easier to fix than in a C paper, but the prose overall is not as polished as an A paper.

*Much better (A paper)*: The prose is polished with good word choice, proper grammar and punctuation, few (if any) instances of awkward phrasing, and no nagging or repetitive problems.