

AMERICAN SLAVERY
Africana Studies 3440-01 (35297) • History 3440-014 (35188) • Spring 2021
T/TH, 12:30-1:45, REMOTE SYNCHRONOUS COURSE

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Course description: The Atlantic slave trade persisted for 400 years and fundamentally changed the politics, economies, cultures, and environments of the societies involved. This class will explore the enslavement of African and indigenous American peoples and the slave societies that took root in the Americas. The course will concentrate on British North America and the United States, but it will also consider the Atlantic world more broadly, addressing the African roots of the slave trade, its origins in the Portuguese Atlantic, its rise and fall throughout the Americas, and the American Indian slave trade that existed (for a time) alongside it. We will consider the institution of slavery in its broadest sense: how it became ingrained in the economic, political, legal, and labor systems of the early modern world, and how it shaped racial ideologies. And we will also study enslaved people in their communities, and the cultures of resistance and resilience that they created through religion, family life, labor, folklore, and other means. And finally, we will consider how emancipation left unresolved conflicts and tensions in slavery's wake. With these themes in mind, this course will encourage students to grapple with the enduring legacy of America's most troubling institution.

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.

Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Flesh, in the Building of a Nation* (2017)

David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (2008)

Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2008)

David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (2009)

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/participation: 15%

Midterm exam: 20%

Final exam: 25%

Two papers: 20% (10% each)

Museum exhibit project: 20%

Attendance policy: I expect regular attendance and will require you to sign in and out for each Teams meeting. Everyone is allowed two "byes" – unexplained absences – 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 not.

Classes will generally include a combination of lecture and discussion, with some time spent in break-out groups on Teams. 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, your attention is on class – no signing in and spending the rest of the time playing video games. We will all get more out of the class if you devote as much effort and attention to virtual meetings as you would to in-person classes.

Papers: You will write two papers (about 6 pages each), in which you will respond to assigned questions based on the readings and lectures. These papers will not be research papers, and you are not expected to seek outside sources; they are intended to give you an opportunity to show how well you have understood the required readings and will be graded in part based on how well you synthesize evidence from primary and secondary sources in your own analysis. You will have a choice of topics, but you must write at least one of the papers assigned before the midterm, and at least one assigned after the midterm. More information (including essay questions) will follow.

The Writing Center, located in King Center 415, can help you with any aspect of your writing. For the current schedule or to make an appointment, visit the Writing Center's website at <https://www.msudenver.edu/writectr/> or call 303-556-6070.

Midterm and final exams: The midterm will cover all material taught and reading assigned up to the exam; the final will be cumulative but weighted toward the second half of the semester. Both exams will feature essay questions (no multiple choice) covering lectures and readings. More information will follow, including study guides.

Museum exhibit assignment: This will be an assignment with group and individual components. In groups, you will create a virtual museum exhibit based on a specific theme and based on a collection of artifacts and images of your choosing. For each item in your exhibit, you will provide the source information, a brief explanation, and a primary source quote (which could be drawn from your readings or elsewhere) that helps bring to light the main point of the item. Individually, you will each write up a brief (2-3-page) rationale for your exhibit that examines how and why you chose the theme and artifacts and what your exhibit will contribute to the wider understanding and memory of slavery. The assignment will be designed so that you can complete it virtually. We will present these exhibits on the last day of class.

Deadlines: All papers and take-home exams are due on Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on the due dates, unless otherwise noted. Late papers will be graded down one-third of a grade (A to A-, etc.) for every day they are late. 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. Extensions on exams will not be allowed, except for students who have a valid excuse and have made prior arrangements with me.

Communication: The virtual format allows for several ways to get in touch. You can reach me through e-mail, Teams (regular meetings and messaging), and Canvas (messaging and assignment submission). If needed or desired, we can then set up a conference via Teams at a mutually acceptable time. Regular communication will be essential to succeeding in this course; I will check my msudenver e-mail account regularly, and you should do the same.

Technical requirements and assistance: All course materials, assignments, and discussion prompts will be available through Canvas. If you need technical assistance provided, you should contact ITS (find contact information using this link: <https://www.msudenver.edu/technology/itsforstudents/>) I am also available to answer questions.

Other course guidelines and policies:

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. A full statement on accommodations covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act is available on Blackboard, in the “Syllabus and Policies” folder.

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](#). 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 Assigned Readings folder on Blackboard.

WEEK ONE: January 19-22

Readings: * Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does it Mean to Think Historically?"
* Daniel Immerwahr, "History Isn't Just for Patriots," *Washington Post* (December 2020)
* Ancient and early modern writings about slavery
Inhuman Bondage, Prologue and chapter 1
Saltwater Slavery, Introduction

January 19: Introductions

January 21: What we are talking about when we talk about slavery

WEEK TWO: January 25-29

Readings: *Inhuman Bondage*, chapters 2-3
Saltwater Slavery, chapters 1-2
* Excerpts from the Justinian Code

January 26: Early forms of slavery

January 28: The origins of Atlantic slavery

WEEK THREE: February 1-5

Readings: *Inhuman Bondage*, chapter 4-5
* Court Cases of the Johnson Family

February 2: Slavery in Latin America and the West Indies

February 4: Slavery and servitude in North American settlements

WEEK FOUR: February 8-12

Readings: * Excerpts from the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641)
* Selected colonial slave codes
* Review this website for Thursday's workshop::
<http://www.virtualjamestown.org/slavelink.html>

February 9: Plantation Revolutions and the emergence of slave societies

February 11: Workshop: Slavery, the law, and racial ideology

WEEK FIVE: February 15-19

Readings: Saltwater Slavery, chapters 3-5

- * Extracts from John Newton's journal (1754)
 - * Excerpts from Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787)
 - * Excerpts from Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself* (1789)
 - * Logbook from the *Black Prince*, a slave ship (1762)
 - * Orlando Patterson, selection from *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982)
- Review this website for Thursday: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/>

February 16: Native Americans and North American Slavery

February 18: The Middle Passage

***** PAPER OPTION 1 DUE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19 *****

WEEK SIX: February 22-26

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapter 6

Saltwater Slavery, chapters 6-7

Slavery's Constitution, prologue

February 23: Urban slavery in eighteenth-century North America

February 25: Rural slavery in eighteenth-century North America

***** PAPER OPTION 2 DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 5 *****

WEEK SEVEN: March 1-5

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapter 7

Slavery's Constitution, chapters 1-2

* Treaty between the Maroons of Jamaica and King George II (1738)

* Two views of the Stono Slave Rebellion

* Richard Grant and Allison Shelley, "Deep in the Swamp, Archaeologists Are Finding How Fugitive Slaves Kept Their Freedom" (2016)

* Selected Revolutionary-era freedom petitions

March 2: Resistance, rumors and repression

March 4: Slaves in the American Revolution

WEEK EIGHT: March 8-12

Readings: Slavery's Constitution, chapter 3, epilogue

- * The United States Constitution (there is a link on Canvas, but you could use a different copy – make sure your copy includes the parts that have been crossed out because they have been nullified by amendments)

March 9: Discussion: Can we reinterpret the American Revolution as a battle over slavery?

March 11: NO CLASS – WORK ON YOUR MIDTERM

***** MIDTERM DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 12 *****

WEEK NINE: March 15-19

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapter 8

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh, preface and introduction

- * Haitian Declaration of Independence (1804)
- * Thomas Jefferson's Correspondence on the Haitian Revolution and Haiti (1791-1825)
- * Haitian Constitution of 1805
- * Brochure for an 1855 slave auction
- * Samuel H. Williamson and Louis P. Cain, "Measuring Slavery in 2016 Dollars"
- * Results from an 1840 auction of slaves from the Whitney Plantation
- * Kimberly Adams, "The Disturbing Parallels between Modern Accounting and the Business of Slavery" (2018)
- * Rachel L. Swarns, "Insurance Policies on Slaves: New York Life's Complicated Past" (2016)
- * Matthew Desmond, "In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation" (2019)

March 16: The Haitian Revolution and its ripple effects

March 18: Slavery and the origins of American capitalism

WEEK TEN: March 22-26 – SPRING BREAK

WEEK ELEVEN: March 29 - April 2

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapter 9

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh, chapters 1-2

- * Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781)
- * Petition from the citizens of Lunenburg County, Virginia (1785)
- * Excerpt from George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South* (1854)
- * Packet of readings on plantation life
- * "American Slavery" interactive map

October 23: No longer a wolf by its ears: the ideological turn to pro-slavery

October 25: The plantation household: masters, mistresses, and slaves

WEEK TWELVE: April 5-9

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapter 10

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh, chapters 3-4

- * Selected letters between enslaved spouses
- * Selected narratives by and about enslaved women

April 6: The slaves' world: bodies, communities, and spaces

April 8: Gender and the experience of slavery

WEEK THIRTEEN: April 12-16

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapter 11

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh, chapter 5

- * The Confessions of Nat Turner (1831)
- * Selected slave spirituals
- * Fugitive slave ads
- * DeNeen L. Brown, "Hunting Down Runaway Slaves: The Cruel Ads of Andrew Jackson and the 'Master Class'" (2017)

April 13: Antebellum slave religion

April 15: Fugitives: Using runaway notices to understand antebellum southern society

***** PAPER OPTION 3 DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 16 *****

WEEK FOURTEEN: April 19-23

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapters 12-13

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh, chapter 6 and epilogue

- * William Wilberforce's abolition speech before Parliament (1789)
- * Excerpt from *David Walker's Appeal* (1829)
- * William Lloyd Garrison, editorial from the first issue of *The Liberator* (1831)
- * Documents on the politics of slavery (two docs in one pdf)
- * 1848 Free Soil Party Platform
- * 1856 Republican Party Platform

April 20: Abolitionism in Britain and the United States

April 22: Slavery, the law, and politics in the nineteenth-century United States

***** PAPER OPTION 4 DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 23 *****

WEEK FIFTEEN: April 26-30

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, chapters 14-15

* Ta-Nehisi Coates, "What this Cruel War Was Over" (2017)

* Alexander Stephens, Cornerstone Speech (1861)

* Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address (1865)

* Look at the "Visualizing Emancipation" website

* Susan Schulten, "Visualizing Slavery" (read the article and link to the map)

April 27: The Age of Emancipation in the Americas

April 29: Emancipation and its aftermath in the United States

WEEK SIXTEEN: May 3-7

Readings: Inhuman Bondage, Epilogue

- * Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* (June 2014)
- * Marie Tyler -McGraw, "Southern Comfort Levels: Race, Heritage Tourism, and the Civil War in Richmond," from Horton and Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History*
- * Sandra A. Arnold, "Why Slaves' Graves Matter"
- * *The 1619 Project* (*New York Times*, 2019): Read the introductory essays by Jake Silverstein and Nikole Hannah-Jones, along with one or two other contributions, based on your own interests (other than Matthew Desmond's, which we have already read).
- * Conor Friedersdorf, "1776 Honors America's Diversity in a Way 1619 Does Not," *The Atlantic* (January 2020)
- * Clint Smith, "Telling the Truth about Slavery Is Not 'Indoctrination,'" *The Atlantic* (September 2020)
- * Executive Order on Establishing the President's Advisory 1776 Commission (November 2020)
- * The 1776 Commission final report (January 2021)

May 4: Slavery in American historical memory

May 6: Museum exhibit presentations

***** MUSEUM EXHIBIT PRESENTATIONS (INCLUDING SLIDE SHOWS) DUE THURSDAY, MAY 6 *****

***** MUSEUM EXHIBIT RATIONALES DUE ON CANVAS, FRIDAY, MAY 7 *****

***** FINAL EXAM DUE FRIDAY, MAY 14 *****

HIS/AAS 3440 • AMERICAN SLAVERY PAPER TOPICS

- *You must respond to TWO of these questions, distributed as follows:*

Everyone must do topic one OR two.

Everyone must do topic three OR four.

- *Responses should be 6 pages each, typed in 12-point font and double-spaced, with 1" margins. Use fonts typical for academic papers (i.e., Times New Roman), not novelty fonts or exceptionally large fonts (like Courier).*
- *For more tips, see the "Paper Guidelines," following this page.*

Topic One (due February 19): Many historians have argued that between the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, slavery transformed in North America and the West Indies, both as an institution and in terms of how enslaved people experienced slavery. Do you agree with this assessment? Using examples from the law (among other examples), argue for or against this interpretation.

Topic Two (due March 5): Orlando Patterson's theory of "social death" argues that the violence and domination that were central to captivity and slavery caused enslaved people to become so marginalized and alienated from society that they lost the ability to see themselves separately from their status as slaves. Using evidence of the Middle Passage, argue for or against the theory of social death. Based on the evidence you have, did the experience of the Middle Passage rob slaves of their social identities and connections?

Topic Three (due April 16): How did the constraints of both race and gender structure the experiences of enslaved women? This question does not merely ask you to describe differences that we can attribute to gender, but rather to analyze whether slavery was essentially different for women than for men, using examples of specific kinds of spaces, exploitation, and authority that women experienced or exercised differently.

Topic Four (due April 23): What were the main components or themes of the pro-slavery ideology that dominated antebellum American politics? How did slaveholders and their supporters weave these themes together to develop a coherent political argument? Choose three components of the pro-slavery argument or rhetoric to support your analysis.

**HIS/AAS 3440 • AMERICAN SLAVERY
PAPER GUIDELINES**

In this class, you will write two six-page papers. Grades will be based on the following components:

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' historical *context*? How might 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 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 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 inappropriate 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.