

GRADING RUBRIC

MATH 105-6: FRESHMAN SEMINAR: THEORIES OF MIND AND MATHEMATICS
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Criterion	A	B	C	D/F
Message and Argument	Your central message is persuasive, eloquent, and memorable, reflecting an ambitious and inventive approach to the ideas. You do not shy away from complications in your argument, but rather make use of those complications, over the course of your essay, to make your argument more subtle. You not only clarify what is at stake, conceptually, but you give a refreshing new perspective on these stakes.	Your central message is generally persuasive, reflecting a responsible engagement with the material. You clarify what is at stake, conceptually, in the ideas discussed.	Your central message has some evidence backing it up, but generally it is not sharp enough: it suggests some of the concepts at play, but leaves them unfocused in some way. Your essay does not develop its points effectively, and/or does not pay enough attention to alternative lines of thought, and/or may have flaws in its reasoning.	There is not much of a central message here. This reads more as a “collection of thoughts.”
Use and Presentation of Evidence	Your essay moves between the presentation of evidence and the interpretation of its meaning. You describe your evidence in rich detail, and imaginatively handle its many aspects. You make sophisticated, convincing use of details, and are alert and responsive to ambiguities, multiple meanings, and alternative lines of interpretation.	Your essay effectively uses evidence to flesh out its message and arguments. At crucial points in your essay, you pay close attention to formal aspects and delve into the layers of meaning present. A bit too often, perhaps, you remain on the level of repeating assertions, summarizing your evidence without further interpretation.	Your essay suffers from an imbalance between the presentation of evidence and the interpretation of its meaning. Perhaps you treat your evidence as “self-evident,” presenting it without much further interpretation. Perhaps you “cherry pick” ideas and go on extended riffs, without grounding those riffs in specific evidence.	There is a debilitating imbalance here between the presentation of evidence and its interpretation. There is far too much interpretation without much in the way of support, or there is far too much evidence presented without much interpretation.

Criterion	A	B	C	D/F
Structure and Organization	The structure of your essay is impressive. From paragraph to paragraph, you sustain your argument's momentum. Within paragraphs, your thinking is clear and nuanced. Digressions are not gratuitous but tactical, reinforcing or complicating your argument. Your title, introduction, and sign-posting make the main message and organization of your essay immediately apparent.	The structure of your essay is effective. Points are developed and sequenced in a clear, logical, and strategically appropriate way. You provide guidance to the reader as to where you're going.	The structure of your essay is perhaps a bit mechanical, with an introduction, body, and conclusions, and points arranged in a perceptible way. There may be irrelevant points or non-functional digressions. The structure may not be clearly sign-posted; the title and introduction may not provide enough guidance, or the paragraphs may have misleading internal structure. You may seem to be writing one paper at the beginning of the essay and another paper at other moments.	The structure of your essay is unclear. Its points don't have a purposeful sense of order, and its paragraphs may not be adequately structured.
Style and Mechanics	Your style — your diction, sentence structures, use of figures, overall "voice" — is fluent, graceful, and even striking. It adds memorability, pleasure, and persuasiveness to what is being said.	Your style is clear, accessible, and appropriate, with few or no grammatical errors that would impede readability or detract from your credibility.	Your style is more or less clear and readable, but slips at times. There may be periodic grammatical errors or stylistic problems (e.g. imprecise diction or overabstract phrasing) that disrupt the intelligibility of what's being said, detract from your credibility, and weaken the essay's overall persuasiveness.	Your style has serious problems of readability or appropriateness. It may have too-frequent lapses in grammar and punctuation.

SELF-GRADING ASSIGNMENT

By next time (Thursday, October 1), please send a short email to theojf@math.northwestern.edu with your honest appraisal of your first essay. How would you grade yourself against this rubric? What techniques will you keep in future essays, and what will you improve?

¹This rubric is based very closely on rubrics I received from colleagues at UC Berkeley.