

## **Standards for the Grading of Independent Work**

- A.** Normally independent work in the A range should present an argument or propose an answer to a well-defined and significant question or set of questions, and it should indicate with care and accuracy the import of its subject for the understanding of sociology. Such independent work will have substantial elements of originality in its conception of its subject, in the evidence and reasoning it brings to bear on that subject, in the analytical techniques it employs, or in all of these; even a specialist in its field of study will find that it contributes to his/her understanding. Independent work in the A range must be grounded in systematic research appropriate to its scope and objectives. Such research will almost always involve attention to the important works on the subject and may require the consultation of original documents, compilation of statistical data, or interviewing. To merit an A, independent work should be well written, that is, it should develop its subject in an orderly way and present its ideas clearly and crisply. Poor grammar and style and more than occasional misspellings have no place in independent work receiving an A.

The mark of A+ should be reserved for independent work that satisfies all of these criteria in high degree. The mark of A- should be given independent work which shows originality but does not meet in a fully satisfactory way one or two other of the requirements of independent work in the A range.

- B.** Independent work in the B range is a less outstanding treatment of a significant subject. A specialist in its field of study should find it informative, though it will yield few insights of interest to a specialist. A well done case study which yields some, if few, lessons of general import, or a good critical review of a significant body of thought that does not carry one much beyond previous work on the subject, would merit a grade in this range. Like the A independent work, that in the B range should be grounded in a substantial amount of research appropriate to its objectives, but the latter will fail to do all that is required for systematic coverage or will ignore important sources. Independent work in the B range should be clearly written and logically organized.

A B+ is an appropriate grade for a sensibly conceived, well-executed, well-written project that shows little originality. A B- is appropriate for well-conceived projects that have some significant flaw in execution or a number of less important shortcomings.

- C.** Independent work in the C range is a competent but not distinguished treatment of a significant subject. A non-specialist should find it informative. It will show evidence of substantial, though not wholly adequate research, and may be flawed in one or two additional ways as well: the logic of an important argument may be faulty, the significance of findings may be explored inadequately, or the writing may be mediocre (though it must generally be clear in its expression of ideas). An informative case study that goes little beyond a narration of events, or a review of some body of literature that gets things right but does little more, should be given a grade in the C range.

C+'s should be given to the most informative of independent work in the C range, C-'s to those that meet the basic requirements of the category but have several serious flaws.

- D.** To merit the grade of D, independent work must treat a non-trivial subject in sociology and must show evidence that its writer has some substantial knowledge about, and understanding of, that subject. Beyond that little can be said in praise of independent work in the D range.
- F.** Independent work that does not meet the minimal requirements for the grade of D should be given an F.