Grading Standards for Papers  
(What do Eriks Want?)

This version is adapted for English 2 SAMA projects.

What Should Papers Do?

The following questions apply to all papers for my classes, including the SAMA projects.

1. What problem or connection have you analyzed?
2. Why did you analyze it?
3. What does your analysis reveal that most readers couldn’t see before?
4. What specific points in the text(s) lead you to these conclusions?

Good papers will provide strong answers to all of these questions, and they will do so with an organizational structure and a command of mechanics that help readers see those answers.

These questions may be simple, but they are not easy. These standards are high. They are meant to challenge you to produce interesting and important work. By asking for revisions of every assignment, the course acknowledges the difficulty of writing essays that truly transform the vision of a reader. Therefore, the process of consultation (with me, your classmates, and others) and revision will occupy a central place in our thinking as the term goes on.

How does that translate into grading?

The second page of this handout provides a chart giving a rough profile of an “A” paper, a “B” paper, and so on. Although I generally dislike grading because it can sometimes end conversation about a paper rather than spurring it, I recognize its importance and I do not give grades lightly.

Can grades be changed after Erik gives them?

Unless I have made a mathematical error, grades are non-negotiable. I will always be happy to explain the rationale for a grade in detail, however.
The SAMA assignment, as sent over email to the class

An annotated bibliography, listing a variety of sources you find for your project, with a brief explanation of what each of them is and how it fits into the field of writing you are examining. I'll ask for a minimum of 10-15 sources representing a number of different kinds of writing.

One SAMA-based essay analyzing the materials in your bibliography as a whole. How do different texts emphasize different stakeholders, address different audiences, use different metaphors, and argue their cases differently? What patterns do you see? For instance, do newspaper writers tend to use one set of metaphors, while CNN chat posters emphasize another? How does the language of your source materials reveal or reflect the purposes of the writers? If the writing has no explicit purpose or audience, what can you tell about its assumed purpose and audience? I expect this essay to be the longer of the two, running about 5 pages.

Another SAMA-based essay that analyzes one of your source texts in detail. In this essay, you will move from the general view of the broad essay to a narrow focus on one source text. What choices does this text make about its SAMA structure? How would other choices have made it a different work? How does its genre (journal article, newspaper piece, Internet post) determine its rhetoric? This should be about a 3-page paper.

How will those three parts be weighted?

I will give separate grades for each section and an overall grade for the project. The bibliography will count for 20% of the grade, the short essay 35%, and the long essay 45%.

What pitfalls should I try especially to avoid?

- **The “general audience” problem.** Let me put this as emphatically as possible: *there is no such thing as a “general audience.”* Instead, there are rhetorical constructions of a general audience. We have worked in class to find ways to analyze the assumptions behind such a construction, and I will expect papers to do that work.
- **Replacing analysis with evaluation.** Beware the language of a review essays. This assignment does not require you to talk about a writer’s success or failure in making a point. I can imagine cases where a brief evaluative comment could be useful: for instance, you might show how a message board poster turned another poster’s metaphor against him to win an argument. Do not, however, let evaluation become your main point: avoid like the plague sentences such as “By using the SAMA structure, we can see that Giddy and Kirby successfully argue that genetic research should continue in a controlled environment.” You might be right, but this assignment does not ask for that kind of evaluation.
- **Replacing quotation and close attention to language with general description.**
- **Writing a SA(ma) essay.** Identifying stakeholders in any essay should be simple. You can do well by thinking creatively about underlying stakeholders and such, but mostly, the stakeholders are a way into talking about the meatier sections. In many cases, as long as you avoid the “general audience” problem, identifying an audience also presents few challenges. Writing about metaphors and argument in a unified, convincing way is a lot harder and therefore a lot more rewarding: make sure you use these sections to build on the base of stakeholders and audience.
- **Choosing source matter that does not help you write the essay.** I believe that most sources can yield strong, interesting SAMA essays. Some will require more work than others, though. An angry or impassioned first-person narrative will likely rely on intense metaphors, for instance, as will people arguing with each other. A two-paragraph scientific report will resist SAMA analysis. When an assignment lets you choose your source, pick one that helps you out.