

MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER (MRP) – GRADING SCHEME

GSPIA is an interdisciplinary department and the variety of MRPs written by its students reflects the disciplinary and methodological diversity of its faculty. MRP subjects may range from policy-focused to more theoretical and/or empirical explorations.

The MRP does not have to make a significant original contribution to academic knowledge of the subject, but it must display extensive research and independent analysis. Students must demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the literature relating to the topic. The collection of data or the empirical analysis of data are not required.

Letter grade	Percentage	Grade definition
A+	90-100	Excellent
A	85-89	Very good
A-	80-84	Very good
B+	75-79	Good
B	70-74	Good
C+	65-69	Adequate
Fail	0-64	Inadequate

A+ (90% and above): Outstanding work that demonstrates independent thought and critical reflection and has an excellent research question as well as systematic and persuasive answers to this question. Work demonstrates complete command of the subject, subtlety of interpretation, exceptional critical evaluation of current research and considerable originality. By using appropriate methodology, methods and data sources, the paper provides strong evidence in support of the key claim(s) put forward by the student. Such work is exceptionally well written and presented, with faultless grammar and style. The arguments developed are strong enough to be considered for publication in a peer-reviewed outlet and eligible for prizes, including those awarded by GSPIA.

A (85-89%): Work shows a considerable amount of critical thought and independence, a capacity to analyze and synthesize, solid organization, evidence of extensive knowledge base with systematically listed sources and a superior grasp of the subject matter. Work also has very a good research question and develops strong arguments in answering it. This paper surpasses work placed in the A- category in several areas, such as originality, subtlety of interpretation, power of critical analysis, critical evaluation of current research and understanding of research methodology, methods and data. Such work is written and presented to high academic standards and can possibly be published with some revisions.

A- (80-84%): Driven by a very good research question, the arguments in this paper are sound and convincing, with evidence of a strong grasp of the subject matter, of solid critical thought and analytic ability and of a very good understanding of the related issues. This paper also shows an awareness of methodological issues and demonstrates an extensive familiarity with the literature. There is clear evidence of independent thought and originality of approach. Examples, empirical illustrations and supporting evidence are valid, reliable and used appropriately while demonstrating clarity and

coherence of argumentation and focus on relevant data. The paper does not demonstrate these characteristics as consistently as in the A category. This work is written and presented to very good academic standards.

B+ (75-79%): Work of this standard is competent and methodical, indicating a clear understanding of the topic and an ability to critically engage with the debates in the field of inquiry. A good research question is presented and answered in the paper. The main arguments are clear and examples as well as supporting evidence are used appropriately. The work is of weaker quality than that in the A category and displays less originality. The structure of the MRP is generally sound, with good organization of ideas, clarity and coherence of exposition and coherent introduction and conclusions. Sources are appropriate, even if their use is not as systematic as work in the categories above. The paper shows analytical power, albeit not as consistently as work in the A- category. The paper is written and presented to good academic standards and is free of major grammatical and syntactic errors.

B (70-74%): Work shows some limitations in coverage and some minor errors in fact or credible interpretation. While there is a good research question, and the question is answered in the paper, there is a tendency to accept ideas uncritically. The paper is mostly descriptive with little evidence of analysis. The logic of some sections is flawed, and there may be unsubstantiated conclusions. Work of this standard is less methodical but is competent and indicates a clear understanding of the topic and some ability to critically engage with the debates in the field. Examples and supporting evidence are present but not always optimally deployed. The structure of the paper is generally sound but is somewhat weakened by shortcomings in the organization of ideas as well as the clarity and coherence of their exposition. Sources are not always appropriate. The work shows some analytical qualities but not consistently. The paper is written and presented to acceptable academic standards but may contain some grammatical and syntactic errors.

C+ (65-69%): There is a research question, but the question is poorly or only partially answered. The work demonstrates a reasonable grasp of the principal materials relevant to the subject that are linked or partially linked through to a partially sustained argumentation from premises to conclusions. The paper has an overall structure that is logical, if not fully thought through. Arguments may display a lack of clarity, sharpness, focus and insufficient appreciation of the context. Obvious points are covered, but the subtleties are missed and there is a tendency to accept received opinions and interpretations with insufficient independent thought. There are some factual errors and shortcomings in terms of coverage, sources and organization and only limited evidence of sustained critical thought. The text is clear but is weakened by grammatical errors and stylistic shortcomings that nevertheless do not obscure the core meaning. A paper in this category typically makes a number of statements that are not adequately supported by the literature or new evidence.

Fail: Such work shows a very limited grasp of the basic literature and reveals major errors and/or omissions. The work offers only superficial understanding of the subject matter and/or contains substantial amounts of irrelevant material. There is no answer to the research question. The paper is likely to contain extensive irrelevancies, lack a central thesis, be inconsistent or inadequate in its use of sources and referencing and is repeatedly marred by errors of grammar and syntax. Arguments are barely discernible, very poorly organized and difficult to follow, or may not even be present; the work recites existing knowledge without critical thought. Evidence is likely to be ignored, weak and limited, and the paper contains many unsupported assertions and statements. It may also be poorly written and presented throughout.