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| **Exceptional Graduate-Level Writing (4)** | **Acceptable Graduate-Level Writing (3-2)\*** | **Unacceptable Graduate-Level Writing (1)** |
| Demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the subject, both within and beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries | Demonstrates competent graduate-level knowledge of the subject | Fails to convince readers that its author has a competent understanding of the subject |
| Makes clear from the outset the important critical question that the paper will answer or the critical problem that it will solve | Shows a clearly defined critical question or problem that the paper sets out to answer or solve | Fails to introduce (or insufficiently develops) the significant critical question that the paper will answer or the problem it will solve |
| Demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the critical debate informing the question or problem | Demonstrates familiarity with the critical debate informing the question or problem | Fails to demonstrate an awareness of the critical debate informing the subject |
| Makes a significant and sophisticated argument of its own that will be an important contribution to the critical debate about the subject | Adequately defends a carefully considered argument (clear thesis) | Fails to develop an argument; has no apparent thesis, or fails to support the thesis |
| Uses secondary sources judiciously and convincingly | Uses secondary sources well enough to support broad claims | Fails to use secondary sources convincingly to support generalizations |
| Is organized with clear rhetorical purpose | Strikes a good balance between levels of generalization and specificity | Is incoherent or ill-organized |
| Uses a critical idiom that is sophisticated, crystal clear, and is technically flawless | Is purposefully organized and written clearly and correctly in an idiom befitting graduate-level expression in English | Fails to maintain a critical, graduate level idiom |
| Makes clear *why* the argument of the paper is important to the critical debate about the question or problem | Follows the formatting conventions for writing in the field, as determined by the MLA | Fails to follow formatting conventions for writing in the field, as determined by the MLA |
| Follows the formatting conventions for writing in the field, as determined by the MLA | Contains construction, grammar, and usage problems that interfere with meaning | Is fraught with construction, grammar, and usage problems |

\*The distinction between a 3 and 2 is determined by the student’s success in meeting the standards listed above.