

What Standards Based Specifications Grading Looks Like in the Classroom:

TELEVISION AND AMERICAN CULTURE SYLLABUS

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Grades:

All assignments in the course will be assessed as Satisfactory / Unsatisfactory, with the specifications required for Satisfactory articulated on each assignment. In general, Satisfactory should not be viewed as “minimally competent” (as is typical for a C grade at Middlebury), but rather as a mark of having achieved the assignment’s learning goals and specifications (probably more like a B grade in an average Middlebury course). Either an assignment meets the goals, or it does not—there is no gradation of assessment. [...]

C Bundle – Students who complete the following will pass the course with a grade of C:

- Actively attend all course meetings, with up to five absences, per the attendance policy below
- Complete at least 7 weekly screening responses to a Satisfactory level
- Complete all 6 questions (at either Basic or Advanced levels) on the three take-home essay exams to a Satisfactory level

B Bundle – Students who complete the following will pass the course with a grade of B:

- Actively attend all course meetings, with up to three absences, per the attendance policy below
- Complete at least 9 weekly screening responses to a Satisfactory level
- Complete all 6 questions on the three take-home essay exams to a Satisfactory level, including at least 3 Advanced level questions

A Bundle – Students who complete the following will pass the course with a grade of A:

- Actively attend all course meetings, with up to two absences, per the attendance policy below
- Complete at least 10 weekly screening responses to a Satisfactory level
- Complete all 6 questions on the three take-home essay exams to a Satisfactory level, including at least 5 Advanced level questions
- Complete the original argumentative essay assignment to a Satisfactory level

Modified grades of + and – will be used when a student’s Satisfactory activities fall between the bundles. For instance, a student who met the requirements for the B Bundle, as well as completing 5 Advanced questions on the exams would receive a B+, while a student who fell just short of the B Bundle requirements would likely receive a B– final grade. Grades of D will only be given in rare cases where a student meets most of the C Bundle requirements but falls short in one area—typically, a student who does not meet the requirements of the C Bundle will fail the course.

Assignments:

Weekly Screening Responses:

Each week, students will watch a selection of television material on Wednesday evening. By Thursday morning, students are expected to post a response to Moodle for that week’s screening. The goal of response is to connect at least one program screened to concepts from the course readings. To earn a Satisfactory, each post must do the following:

- Be submitted on Moodle by Thursday at 9am
- Consist of at least 300 words
- Demonstrate that you have watched and read the material
- Be accurate about the course material
- Draw explicit connections between ideas raised in the readings to material from the screening
- Convey something that personally struck you as interesting, compelling, engaging, or otherwise moved you to write about this aspect of the course materials
- Write in a clear manner – your style can be less formal than typical academic prose, but it should be serious and engaged with ideas
- Contain no more than 3 errors to Standard Written English

It is recommended that you compose your responses in a word processor and paste the text into Moodle, as web browsers can crash as you are writing. Screening responses cannot be revised or submitted late.

Learning Goals:

All students who pass the course (with a minimum grade of C) will have demonstrated the ability to:

- Describe how American television works as a commercial industry, functions as an aesthetic and communication medium, and both shapes and is shaped by American culture and society
- Apply specific vocabulary and concepts to explain television’s industrial, formal, cultural, and technological facets
- Communicate their ideas with fluency and clarity

Take-Home Essay Exams:

There will be three take-home essay examinations, all of which are required to be Satisfactorily completed to pass the course. Each exam will be distributed on a Thursday, and due the following Tuesday. Students may consult notes, readings, screenings, and other online material, but cannot consult with other people (besides Professor Mittell) during the writing process. Per Middlebury’s Honor Code, all work submitted is presumed to be your own.

Each exam will have two general prompts, with each prompt offering two options: a Basic and an Advanced essay. The Basic essay will require students to demonstrate that they understand and can communicate course material in their own words. The Advanced essay will require students to apply course material to an original analysis, requiring higher-level engagement with the material. Students are free to choose which option they choose for each prompt. For an example of this difference, a hypothetical Basic prompt might ask, “How does the television industry use the Nielsen ratings to sell audiences to advertisers?”; the Advanced version might ask, “How effective are the Nielsen ratings measuring viewer behaviors, and how might this system better serve the interests of television viewers?”

Final Argumentative Essay:

The final paper in the class will be an analytic essay about a television program of your choosing, due on December 20. The basic idea is to write an essay that could function as an additional chapter of *How to Watch Television*. Because the essay is due during the exam period, revisions will not be allowed after the due date; however, students electing to complete this assignment are encouraged to meet with Professor Mittell and submit drafts for feedback in advance. A proposal for the essay will be due April 7. More detailed specifications will be included with the assignment.

Active Attendance:

You are expected to attend all class meetings on time, having done the readings, thought about the material, and prepared to engage in discussion and in-class activities. This is not a lecture course, so active participation and engagement is required. Attendance will be taken regularly—students who are present in class but who are unprepared or do not participate adequately will be marked as absent. Being late two times counts as an absence. Students who miss a class should find out what they missed from their classmates and learn the necessary material.

Students who achieve a higher level of mastery (with a minimum grade of B) will have also demonstrated the ability to:

- Analyze television’s industrial, formal, cultural, and technological facets with original insights and connections between different examples and contexts
- Students who achieve the highest level of mastery (with a grade of A) will have also demonstrated the ability to:**
- Create, substantiate, and communicate an original analytic argument that synthesizes multiple facets of television