Note: These guidelines for first-year English composition at Georgia Perimeter College reflect the writing standards currently followed by other major institutions in the University System of Georgia. An individual instructor’s criteria for a particular assignment may be more detailed or extensive.

COMPETENT ESSAY: All papers must meet these basic competency standards. A competent paper earns a C (70-79%).
1. Clarity and Organization of Central Purpose
   o The essay has a clear and controlling purpose—a well-considered thesis—around which the paper revolves.
   o The essay flows smoothly from the introduction through the body paragraphs to the conclusion, transitioning from one supporting idea to the next without digressing from the central purpose.

2. Developing Details, Analysis, and Explanation
   o The essay presents appropriate and relevant details, examples, and evidence.
   o Specific details and concrete evidence are used in support of claims rather than general opinions or vague commentary. The essay avoids factual inaccuracies and major logical fallacies.
   o The writer clearly distinguishes his or her ideas from outside source material, and correctly cites all outside source material in MLA style (or assigned standard bibliographic form).

3. Presentation and Audience Reception
   o The writer is aware of his or her audience and uses appropriate language and diction.
   o The essay is relatively free of errors in Standard English grammar, punctuation, usage, and documentation.
   o The essay meets the instructor’s stated requirements for length and/or format.

BEYOND COMPETENT: A skillfully crafted paper exceeds all competency requirements by demonstrating insightful understanding of key concepts, a strong and distinctive voice, and careful consideration of opposing viewpoints. An essay that goes beyond competency will earn a grade of B (80-89%).

4. Fluency & Coherence
   o The writer expresses clear understanding of the major premises of the thesis.
   o The writer varies sentence structure and length to hold readers’ interest and to create emphasis.
   o The essay examines the topic from a fresh perspective, and, when necessary, integrates direct quotes, summaries, and paraphrases from outside source materials.

5. Forceful and Stimulating Writing
   o The writer demonstrates audience awareness by addressing the rhetorical appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos.
   o The essay is forceful without being dogmatic, provocative without being inflammatory, and stimulating without being glib, patronizing, or contrived.

EXCEPTIONAL: An exceptional paper exhibits all the above qualities and in addition demonstrates mastery of several characteristics of superior writing. An exceptional paper earns the grade of A (90-100%).

6. Superior Writing: The essay exhibits more than one of the following characteristics:
   o original and insightful analysis
   o clear and refined discussion of complex ideas
   o sophisticated rhetorical stance
   o unique and compelling voice
   o fresh, innovative, and textured style

UNSUCCESSFUL: An unsuccessful essay has several minor problems with Clarity and Organization of Central Purpose; Developing Details, Analysis, and Explanation; and Presentation and Audience Reception; or it has major problems in one of these areas. The unsuccessful essay will earn a grade of D (60-69%) or F (<60%). The writer should schedule a conference with his or her instructor immediately.