This sheet is meant to provide some information concerning the grading scales I use when evaluating reading essays and long essays. It should be noted, though, that grading papers is an essentially subjective exercise. There is no objective grading template that I can lay over each and every essay. Given this, you need to have some confidence in my ability to evaluate these essays in an equitable and informed fashion. I have graded in excess of 3,200 philosophy papers in my time. Nevertheless, evaluation is essentially subjective, so you need to be aware of your role in the process – if you believe that I have made a mistake or have been less than charitable, it is your responsibility to challenge me and make me defend my evaluation. You and your opinions are a very large part of this process.

In what follows, I supply the characteristics associated with the various grades I give.

**Reading Essays**

95-100

-- Focused and well-argued reconstruction; not a summary, but a personal restatement of the textual argument that demonstrates the author's understanding.

-- Focused and well-argued comment; the argument must be clear, from premises through conclusion; further, the argument must be in good shape logically, and it should be cogent and compelling, although not necessarily sound.

-- The two sections must be well integrated and the transition between them must be smooth.

-- The writing must be smooth and not distracting.

-- The paper should be one that I engage with as a philosopher and not as a writing critic. It should be almost flawless.

90-94

-- Both recon and comment must be in very good shape, and they must be well integrated and well written.

-- The difference between the top category and this category is that the latter contains flaws and
is not as philosophically engaging. To be honest, the difference is one of feel for me--the papers that receive 95-100 blow me away, whereas those receiving 90-95 merely impress me.

80-89

-- One of the recon or comment is in good shape (see above), but the other is weak, although the weak section must contain arguments.

-- Alternatively, the two sections might be in good shape but the paper as a whole is not well integrated or the writing in the paper might get in the way of comprehension.

70-79

-- Neither section is in particularly good shape, but they contain arguments and are not that far away from being in good shape.

-- Alternatively, one of the sections might be in good shape, but the other isn't and the paper is not well integrated or the writing is weak.

60-69

-- This paper has no strong sections and is not well argued, well integrated, or well written.

Under 60

-- No strong sections and no arguments. This is a very brief paper that was written in almost no time at all and reflects this fact.

Long Essays

90-100

-- Solid introduction that lays out a clear and cogent thesis and a plan for developing and defending the thesis.

-- Bibliography that conforms to APA or MLA standards and in-text page citations, where appropriate.

-- The writing must be clear and effective, both at the micro-level and the macro-level, i.e., at the level of clauses and sentences, and at the level of paragraphs and sections. Thus, the paper must be well organized, where this means that the argument it advances must be clearly laid out in the
text. (Category 3)

-- If the paper includes a reconstruction section that focuses on an argument in another essay, then the reconstruction must be focused and clear; further, it must not be a summary. The reconstruction should cast the textual argument in a form that best expresses the author's understanding. The best reconstructions recast the argument in a different form than it appears in the text, thereby shedding new and different light on it. (Category 2)

-- It contains considerable argumentation that originates with the author. This must be clear, well motivated, and coherent with the rest of the paper. The arguments made must be logically solid and compelling, although not necessarily sound. Premises should be marked and defended, and it should be clear how they lead to the conclusion. (Category 1)

-- The paper will not include a lot of extra, tangential discussions, unless these are marked as such by inclusion in footnotes.

80-89

-- A paper gets this grade if it falls short in one of the three Categories listed above. (The categories are numbered in decreasing order of importance; however, if the writing is especially bad, then this takes on added importance.)

-- A paper that is strong in each of the three Categories will get some flavor of "A", even if it falls short on all the other listed items.

70-79

-- A paper gets this grade if it falls short in two of the three Categories listed above, or if it falls well short in Category 1.

60-69

-- A paper gets this grade if it falls short in all three of the Categories.

Under 60

-- A paper gets this grade if I believe that no effort at all was made on the paper.