Criteria for Evaluating Essays

**Appropriateness.** Does your essay answer each of the questions stated in the handout you received in class? Will it be obvious to the reader what your answers are to each of those questions?

**Clarity of exposition and argument.** How clearly have you explained the relevant readings? How clearly have you expressed your critical evaluation of the arguments contained in the readings? Have you clearly stated the reasons behind your evaluations?

**Critical understanding of the material.** Have you demonstrated a detailed, thorough understanding of the relevant readings? Is there any important part or aspect of an argument that you have not considered? Do your accounts of the arguments make sense in light of what you know about the larger context in which they are set (i.e. the article as a whole)?

**Fairness to the authors' arguments.** Are your interpretations of the authors' arguments charitable? Have you done your best to interpret them as good, strong arguments? If you think a certain argument is badly flawed, can you identify any beliefs that the author may have held which would make the argument stronger than you first thought? If you have expressed doubts about whether a certain premise of the author's argument is true, have you supplied an argument to show that that premise is probably or certainly false?

**Coherence of your explanations and arguments.** Does your essay make sense as a whole? Is it well-organized? At each stage of the essay, is it easy to tell what you are saying and how that fits in with what you have already said? Are there any conflicts between things you say at different points in the essay? Do your arguments flow logically from your premises to your conclusions?

**Ability to anticipate objections to your point of view.** Have you considered how the authors of the articles you discuss (or someone else who read your essay and disagreed with you) might respond to your arguments? Are your arguments open to any obvious objections? Have you committed any glaring errors of reasoning? Are any of the assumptions you make obviously false?

**Documentation of works cited.** Have you noted where you refer to the work of writers other than yourself? Have you included *page numbers in parentheses* in the text of your essay to mark where you refer to works on the course syllabus? Have you included *full endnotes or footnotes* to mark where you refer to works other than those on the course syllabus? Have you included a *bibliography* listing all the bibliographical information about books you refer to which are not on the course syllabus?