

## For the Student: About Criterion

Criterion is an external software application that can help you to improve your writing throughout your academic career. It will also better prepare you for the professional world, where you'll find that polished and professional written communication is essential to success. Here's a **brief explanation** of how to get the most out of this software.

### Criterion

*Criterion* is a tool that can be used to practice outlining your written work in a variety of ways. It will also give you feedback on the writing that you submit. This allows you a chance to revise your work before turning it in, so that you may earn a higher grade.

- **Three Student Guide Tutorials:** There are three additional PDFs linked on this page titled *Register and Log in*, *View and Submit an Assignment*, and *Student Guide* (from the software publisher). These guides have screenshots and will show you step-by-step how to get your Criterion account, how to login, and how to use the software. Keep in mind, your instructor might set up the software a little differently than some of the screenshots you see.
- **IMPORTANT:** when your instructor sends you an access code so that you can be added to their Criterion course, **you must EITHER create an account if you don't have one OR login to your existing account.** You can NOT create more than one Criterion account. **If you have trouble with Criterion, it may be because you forgot that you already have an account and are trying to create a new one!** Contact Criterion if you need to reset your password.

### Important Notes About Features

The **e-rater holistic engine**, (*if enabled by your instructor*), provides you with a score of your writing. It can NOT replace human reader, however, so the score feedback is somewhat generic and limited. In fact, a high score might lead you to think you don't need to work on your essay when you really do! If this feature is enabled by your instructor, think of it as merely a guideline.

The most commonly used feature is **category based feedback**, (feedback on organization, grammar etc.), which is helpful because it directs you to review the related content and to double check your work. It too, however, is not perfect. For example, it might tag your headings or subheadings as sentence fragments.

While machine learning is imperfect, **being able to recognize the limitations of the software provides you with an indirect learning opportunity.** Be attentive to where there might be

ambiguity and use that opportunity to confirm your writing choices. Double check grammatical concepts if you are not sure about them. Ultimately, you are the person responsible to do the work that helps you to improve your writing skill!

### Strengths of *Criterion*:

- *Planning Templates* – encourages different ways to approach your writing and outlining. It reinforces the habits of pre-writing and outlining.
- *Feedback* – emphasizes the importance of understanding the structural elements of good writing. It also reinforces the habits of revising, and careful proofreading.
- *Collaborative* – peer review is a good practice, but this feature may or may not be enabled by your instructor. You can always ask a friend to give constructive feedback on your drafts as you develop them.

### Limitations of *Criterion*:

- *It Can't Read for Content* – this software is primarily for outlining and reviewing structural issues with your papers. It can NOT determine if your argument is well supported, for example, which is a critical element.
- *Text Heavy Quick-Access Guides* – there are more interactive elements in *Excelsior OWL*, (<http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/writing/index.html>), which is an excellent resource to improve your reading and writing skills.
- *Warning on Word Count Limit* – If you submit more than 1000 words you will see a warning that the scoring won't be accurate because of the length. Again, this is a tool for developing writing skill and it does NOT replace a human reader. As mentioned above the e-rater holistic engine provides somewhat generic feedback. Use *Criterion* for developing drafts and reviewing your structure problems.