Common Problems

Format:
• Don’t forget page #s or a descriptive title—i.e. not just “Paper #1” or “Marx”

Content Issues:
• You need to define and explain key concepts—this is part of demonstrating that you understand them. Samples from these questions: bourgeoisie, proletariat, means/mode of production, commodity, types of value, species-being, class, alienation, materialism, etc.

Argument Issues:
• Beware of using too many quotes or of using quotes that are too long. You should NOT be taking up 3–4 lines (or more) with a quote. Use paraphrasing and summary skills in your own words (remember to cite paraphrased ideas, though!)
• At the opposite extreme, you need to use citations—it’s hard to write an assignment based on texts without ever referring to them, directly (quotations) or indirectly (paraphrasing). You need to provide evidence from the text that supports your argument.
• Always integrate your quotes—quotations can rarely stand alone as their own sentence. What is Marx saying in each quote, and why does it matter for your argument?
• Punctuation samples: Marx argues “quote here” (325). OR: The bourgeoisie “quote here” (Marx, 325).

Writing Quality Issues:
• Give your paper structure/strong organization with an introduction, clear thesis, forecasting, transitions, and conclusion. The intro should give the reader an overview of your whole argument.
• Each paragraph should focus on one main idea.
• Passive vs. Active Voice: Avoid passive voice to make your sentences more interesting/clear. Active voice explains who’s doing what; passive voice tells what is being done to the subject. Active: the bourgeoisie exploit workers. Passive: Workers are exploited by the bourgeoisie.
• Subject/Verb Agreement: a singular subject (i.e. “Marx”) takes a singular verb (i.e. “claims”). A plural subject (“the laborers”) takes a plural verb (“work”).
• Singular/Plural Agreement: be consistent with pronouns—i.e. capitalist=he/she, while capitalists=they.
• Present vs. Past Tense: Be consistent throughout the paper.

Grading Shorthand
WC=word choice. Did you use a word that conveys the wrong meaning?
SP=spelling. Please spellcheck your papers AND read them over/have someone else read.
Awk=awkward. Try reading your paper out loud to listen for sentences that don’t make sense.
Pass.=passive voice
Rep.=repetitive
Arg=argument
✓= on the right track. good point
Cite=citation