

When There's No Way to Pass

It is distressing when students fail. It's sometimes tempting to spend extra time with failing students late in the semester, charting out elaborate schedules of work to be turned in. Those of us who have done this know that these students are unlikely to turn up to class again, much less pass. The Academy Resource Center (ARC) gets many referrals from teachers late in the semester regarding such students.

Here are common questions teachers have about students on a path to failure:

What do I do with a student who can't pass?

Inform the student of his standing. If you have been grading fairly and honestly all along, this should not be a surprise to you or the student. Don't mislead the student into thinking he can pass if, in fact, it is impossible. Encourage the student to continue attending; the extra time with the material can be helpful when he repeats the class next semester.

What about a student who does poorly early in the semester?

Initiate a conversation about your concerns after you report progress grades. Refer students to the ARC and insist that they go. **ARC** coaches have extensive experience working with students who are failing or at risk of failing. Coaches can help students make the best decisions about where to focus their energy and assist them with time management plans for the remainder of the semester.

What if I am not sure if the student can pass?

When in doubt, your Director can help you assess a student's ability to pass. Bring your notes, grades, written feedback, and examples of the student's work to your Director for a second opinion.

What about a borderline student who could possibly pass?

For a borderline student, create a concise list of exactly what the student needs to do to in order to pass the

class. Create firm deadlines and do not negotiate the terms. Expect the student to tell you what he or she will do to complete the necessary work.

Shouldn't a failing student drop the class to get a refund and avoid an F? Dropping late in the semester makes no difference to a student's GPA or refund. Any student who drops a class after attending the fourth week receives a WF. A WF is the same as an F when calculated into a student's GPA. Refunds are prorated according to how many weeks into the semester the student attended class. (Some students concerned about their GPAs for reasons of scholarships or academic probation may drop your class early in order to focus on improving grades in their other classes.)

Can I tell the student he has to drop my class if he is failing anyway?

No. You cannot insist that a student leave your class simply because his grades are not up to standard. Some students who are failing will continue to attend class to maintain a full-time course load, which they need to retain their student visa status.

Should I issue the student an incomplete (I) grade?

No. Incomplete grades should be issued only to students who are lacking a final assignment that can not be realistically completed within the regular semester. A grade of I may be assigned only when the quality of the work submitted throughout the semester is satisfactory and only a final essential element has not been completed due to circumstances beyond the student's control. Incomplete grades should not be used as a way for a student to avoid a failing grade after having been frequently absent or lacking in assignments completed throughout the semester. Your Director must approve any Incompletes that are issued, and the student must turn in the missing work before the following semester.



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