

Fair, Transparent and Meaningful Grading

Whether we like it or not, students pay attention to grades. If grading practices appear inconsistent, arbitrary, mysterious, or otherwise unfair, you can spend a lot of energy dealing with student challenges.

First and foremost, students should never receive a grade for simply physically (or electronically) showing up. All grades you assign must be related to work (major assignments, in-process assignments and building block assignments) the student has completed as part of your class.

Here are some suggestions to ensure that your grading system is fair, transparent, and meaningfully connected to the most important learning in your class:

- Create assignments (and the grading standards for them) with the **learning outcomes** in mind. The grading criteria for important projects, papers, and tests should dovetail with the stated course learning outcomes on the syllabus. Make the connection explicit for your students by explaining how each major assignment helps develop the skills needed to achieve the final course outcomes.
- Grade what you teach; teach what you grade. Assess what students learn in your class, not skills and knowledge they have acquired outside of your class. It's okay to assume they will transfer and develop skills from previous classes, especially in upper division classes. However, weight your grading to focus on the concepts and skills developed in your course. Grading the critiquing skills of first semester students, for instance, if you haven't explained and practiced how to give constructive criticism, is hardly fair.
- Assess the full range of skills being taught. Check to see you have a way of measuring achievement for each outcome on your syllabus. If your course has four learning outcomes but your assignments assess only two of them, you will not have a full picture of student ability for your course.
- Keep students on target by sharing grading criteria in advance. It's difficult for students to meet your standards if they don't know what you are looking for. Well-crafted **rubrics** with specific criteria and levels of achievement provided when the assignment is introduced help students live up to your expectations and progress.
- Grade early and regularly. Students are more likely to hit the target if they have more than one shot. Give students an early opportunity to learn your standards early and keep them informed of their progress throughout the semester. Don't wait until midterms, or worse, the end of the semester, to let students know where they stand on the core skills and ideas being taught in your class. In addition, multiple measures of performance (projects, quizzes, and critique participation) are more reliable; they give a more accurate picture of ability than a single measure.



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