

The Meaning of Grades

Unknown macro: 'space-breadcrumbs'

Why is this important?

Grades have different meanings, depending on the type of class you're teaching and the level of your students. A 'C' does not mean exactly the same thing in every class, so it's important to take context into account when assigning grades and communicating feedback to your students. For example, what is 'C' work for a freshman will be — and *should* be — quite different from the 'C' work of a graduating senior.

Grading for the level of your students

As the below chart describes,

- When a *beginning* student receives an 'C,' it means that the student has “basic familiarity with the skills” and is “ready to move ahead, but may be at risk of falling behind as skills become more complex.”
- In contrast, for a graduating senior a 'C' means that the student's work “meets minimum department standards” and “meets entry-level industry standards.”

	What does an A mean?	What does a B mean?	What does a C mean?	What does a D mean?
Beginners Individual assignments	Mastered the skills taught. May benefit from additional challenges.	Good grasp of skills, although weak in a few areas. Ready to move ahead	Basic familiarity with the skills. Ready to move ahead, but may be at risk of falling behind as skills become more complex.	Not ready to move ahead to more complex skills.
End of semester projects Midpoints	Client would pay for the product and would offer fulltime employment.	Client would pay for the product and would offer freelance work.	Client is satisfied with the product.	Client would not pay for the product.
Advanced students End of semester or program	Exceed department standards. Solidly meets industry standards.	Solidly meets department standards. Needs improvement to meet industry standards.	Meets minimum department standards. Meets entry-level industry standards.	Below department standards.

Adding context to your rubrics

Adding information about the meaning of the various grades to your rubric can help contextualize the grades you assign for your students. For example, if you were teaching a freshman class on cookie- baking, you could add the “Beginners” contextual information to your grading rubric — like this:

Assignment: Bake one dozen chocolate chip cookies using an original recipe.

	Excellent (A) <i>You have mastered the skills taught and may benefit from additional challenges.</i>	Good (B) <i>You have a good grasp of skills, although weak in a few areas. You are ready to move ahead.</i>	Acceptable (C) <i>You have a basic familiarity with the skills. You are ready to move ahead — but may be at risk of falling behind as skills become more complex.</i>	Unacceptable (D) <i>You are not yet ready to move ahead to more complex skills.</i>	No work to evaluate (F)
Number of Chips	chocolate chip in every bite	chips in about 75% of bites	chocolate in 50% of bites	chocolate in less than 50% of bites	
Texture	chewy	chewy in middle, crisp on edges	texture either crispy/crunchy or 50% uncooked	texture resembles a dog biscuit	
Color	golden brown	either light from undercooking or light from being 25% raw	either dark brown from overcooking or light from undercooking	burned	

Taste	home-baked taste	quality store-bought taste	tasteless	store-bought flavor, preservative aftertaste; stale, hard, chalky	
Richness	rich, creamy, high-fat flavor	medium fat contents	low-fat contents	nonfat contents	

Credit: Created by Rachel Levin, Faculty Development

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