

Explain Your Grading Practices

Students need to understand the process you use to calculate their grade from the very beginning of the course and throughout. Including an explanation of your approach in the syllabus along with explanations of how each assignment is graded and finally how individual grades fits into the overall grade is key. These approaches offer students the information they need to take more ownership of their learning.

Use Your Syllabus to Communicate Your Approach to Grading

A syllabus should clearly connect learning outcomes, assignments, and grades (Walvoord & Anderson, 2010).

- Begin by sharing what students can expect to learn in the course. Focus on how the learning is relevant to the course, future courses, and their future in general in the workplace and beyond.
- Show how their work in the class, including assessments, assignments, and class activities, will help them learn the content and skills.
- Clearly identify how students will demonstrate their learning and how the work will be assessed. Including a clear and transparent assessment section also benefits you, as you will often see "less student frustration, anxiety, and/or complaints with a thorough and accessible presentation" in the assessment section of a syllabus (Gannon, 2018).
- Provide a pie chart that visually represents the comparable weights of each grading category in your course.
- Explain how grades work in this class.
 - What grading scale will you use? How is the final grade calculated?
- Share and explain your policies for late work, your approach to retaking exams or redoing assignments, and how they should be transparent about why you have certain policies in place. For example, include a note about the important role of participation for learning if you have a strict attendance policy (Gannon, 2018).
- Lastly, consider how and why you might build in flexibility with your policies, and make that flexibility explicit for all students.

Explain How Each Assignment Will Be Graded

When introducing a new assignment, spend time explaining to students how the assignment will be graded and how this grade will be factored into their overall grade for the course.

- Provide clear directions that include the criteria for grading.
- Explain any rubrics that will be used for grading, either in a video or in person.

Help Students Focus on Learning

When discussing grades with students, shift their attention away from points and grades. Instead, help them connect their level of mastery on the assignment with how the material will support their future goals.



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- Walvoord, B. E., & Anderson, V. J. (2010). *Effective grading: A tool for learning and assessment in college* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.



Support Students in Tracking Their Grades

When students track their own academic progress, they are encouraged to take more ownership of their learning and are more likely to persist when they encounter challenges to meeting their goals (Black, 2017). Students tracking their own grades are also more intrinsically motivated (Black, 2017).

Use a Grade-Tracking Sheet

Create a chart that contains each assignment and the maximum number of points students can earn on the assignment. Include a blank box where they can enter the grade they earned for each assignment. Provide instruction to students explaining how they can then calculate their own grade at any point in the semester.

Show Students How to Access Their Grades in the LMS

Create a video showing your screen in student view that explains to students how to access and read their grades in the LMS.

Use Student Data Office Hours

Encourage students to bring their grade-tracking sheet to office hours and use it to guide a discussion about their goals and next steps.

Source

Black, M. (2017, November 29). *Helping students track their own progress*. Student Futures. https://studentfutures.org/college-planning/helping-students-track-their-own-progress/



Use Standards-Based Grading

Standards-based grading aligns grading and assessment to clearly identified course standards, competencies, outcomes, or objectives. Unlike traditional grading practices, which are based on an accumulation of points or percentages, standards-based grading emphasizes the most recent and accurate demonstration of student performance relative to those standards (Buckmiller et al., 2017). Whereas more traditional 100-point grading scales allocate points to individual assignments, and students can earn them as they go (Haystead & Marzano, 2009), standards-based grading focuses on students' progress toward mastery of course outcomes.

Standards-based grading focuses on students' ability to meet a clear set of standards rather than their completion of a set of assignments. Although commonly used at the K–12 level, standards-based grading is not as frequently used in higher education (Beatty, 2013).

There are several benefits to standards-based grading, including:

- Grading is a more accurate representation of a student's mastery of course concepts at the time those concepts are being measured (O'Connor, 2010).
- Students are more motivated because they can see which standards they have mastered and which standards they need to continue to work on (O'Connor, 2010).
- Standards-based grading promotes a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006 & Boaler, 2015).
- Standards-based grading promotes equity because it allows students the opportunity to learn and grow from early attempts, reducing the negative impact of a lack of prior experience (Boaler, 2006).

Whereas traditional gradebooks are typically organized by listing every assignment and assessment chronologically, with each assigned to a category with its own percentage weight, standards-based gradebooks are set up by course outcome, with entries for evidence of student mastery toward those outcomes.

Begin the process of standards-based grading by setting up your gradebook by course outcome as shown in the example below. The date in the chart may indicate the date you collected data regarding the student's level of mastery, or you may replace "date" with an assignment or assessment designed to measure that course outcome.

	Course Outcome #1		Level	Cours	e Outco	me #2	Level	Course Outcome #3		Level	Course Outcome #4		Level			
Name	Date	Date	Date		Date	Date	Date		Date	Date	Date		Date	Date	Date	
	Grade	Grade	Grade		Grade	Grade	Grade		Grade	Grade	Grade		Grade	Grade	Grade	

If you have an exam that assesses multiple course outcomes, rather than entering a grade for the entire exam, consider calculating individual grades for question sets aligned to each course outcome. Check with your technology team to see if they have suggestions for setting up your gradebook in the LMS to reflect a standards-based approach.

Instructors often average the grades for the summative assessments and assignments for each outcome. However, in the example below, the instructor is replacing older evidence with the newest evidence to indicate student mastery at the end of the course, which is a practice designed to increase equity. Learn more about this approach in the implementation resource on assigning greater weight to more recent and summative evidence of mastery.



Name	Course Outcome #1			Final Level	Course Outcome #2			Final Level	Course Outcome #3			Final Level	Final Grade
Hume	Date	Date	Date		Date	Date	Date		Date	Date	Date		
	Grade	Grade	Grade		Grade	Grade	Grade		Grade	Grade	Grade		
Amir	4/4	4/6	4/8		4/11	4/13	4/15		4/11	4/15	5/5		
	1	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	0	2	3	3	3.3/B+

In this example, based on the gathered evidence for each course outcome, the student earned a 4 or exceeding mastery in Course Outcome #1 and has mastered course outcomes #2 and #3. The instructor in this course averages the most recent evidence of student mastery for a final grade. Based on their scores, Amir has earned a B+ in this course.

Sources

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- Boaler, J. (2006). How a detracked mathematics approach promoted respect, responsibility, and high achievement. *Theory Into Practice*, *45*(1): 40–46. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4501_6
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Reduce Bias by Focusing on Academic Achievement

According to Joe Feldman, author of *Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms* (2019), the three pillars of equitable grading are:

- 1. grading practices that are mathematically accurate and reflect a student's academic performance
- 2. grading practices that are bias-resistant, preventing bias subjectivity from entering into grades
- 3. grading practices that motivate students to strive for academic success, persevere, and accept struggles and setbacks in order to gain critical lifelong skills

To be accurate, grades must correctly represent a student's level of academic performance on course outcomes. Including participation, attendance, or other nonacademic behaviors in the grade calculations yields a grade that does not clearly represent a student's academic performance. Bias-resistant grading practices prevent our implicit biases, which are impossible to ignore or erase, from misrepresenting students' academic performance (Feldman, 2019). Grading practices should also motivate students to prioritize learning, support a growth mindset, and give students opportunities for redemption (Feldman, 2019).

It is important to note that there are no research studies supporting the idea that low grades are effective punishment or encourage students to try harder or do better (Dueck, 2014; Guskey, 2000; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Marzano, 2000). In fact, Guskey (2008) found that low grades often prompt students to withdraw from learning.

What Not to Include and Why

Participation and effort are behaviors that require instructors to "subjectively witness, interpret, and judge students through a culturally specific and biased lens" (Feldman, 2020). Including these behaviors depends on an instructor's interpretation of what levels of participation and effort are expected and assumes that they are able to observe these behaviors fairly in all students.

Extra credit reinforces the message that the class is not solely about mastering specific content; instead it is about acquiring points that can result in a grade that is not a clear representation of a student's academic progress on course outcomes. Even when extra credit is related to course content, it may allow students to earn extra points in one outcome to compensate for work in another outcome.

Finally, extra credit is inequitable because it often reflects a student's environment over which they may have little control. Although we make extra credit optional and open to all students, not all students can take equal advantage of the opportunities because they may require additional resources such as time or money. Research confirms that lower achieving students simply do not complete extra-credit assignments as often as higher achieving students (Feldman, 2019). Bottom line regarding extra credit: If the work is important to student learning, require it from everyone. If it is not, do not include it in your grades (Feldman, 2019).

Attendance: All grades should be determined by proficiency, not seat time (O'Connor, 2010). Attendance should be monitored but not graded unless student attendance is required to assess their mastery in course outcomes. Attendance may be required in some courses where student performance must be monitored and observed by faculty. In these cases, the results of the assignment or behavior observed is what is graded, not their attendance, and their lack of attendance would yield an incomplete grade.

Sources

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Use Mathematically Accurate Grading Scales

The goal of grades is to provide an accurate description of what students have learned (Guskey, 1996) related to course outcomes. To ensure this, instructors must consider: (a) the effect of calculating central tendency or an average; (b) the effect of extreme marks, especially zeros; and (c) the possible use of incomplete grades (O'Connor, 2010).

The 100-Point Scale

Although there are exceptions, most grading systems rely on a 100-point scale. The scale itself is problematic because 60% of the scale represents failing (0%–59%), whereas just 21% represents a B or above, the grades that most often represent meeting standards. The 100-point scale is simply mathematically unsound, particularly when we assign a zero (Feldman, 2018).

Consider a student who earns a 95, 85, 75, and 65 on four of the course assignments and then receives a zero for failing to submit the final assignment. Based on the first four grades, the student has an average of 80%. However, when we add the 0 into the calculation, the grade is reduced to a 64%, or a D. The increased negative impact of a zero, because of the lopsided scale, often makes it a challenge, if not impossible, for a student to recover from that failure. Feldman and others recommend two more accurate alternatives: minimum grading and the 0–4 point scale.

Minimum Grading

Minimum grading works to correct the 100-point-scale problem by ensuring that each grade level be represented by an equal number of points. This requires setting a minimum score above zero, often set at 50%, which ensures that the number of points from an F to a D is the same as from a B to an A.

90–100 = A 80–89 = B 70–79 = C 60–69 = D 50–59 = F

You may worry that this process results in grade inflation. Peer-reviewed research conducted by the University of Massachusetts (Carifio & Carey, 2013) found that minimum grading used over a seven-year period at a local high school did not lead to widespread grade inflation. Carifio & Carey (2013) note how minimum grading yields more equitable results for students:

Students fail for many reasons, but minimum grading is a specific grading practice targeted at a very specific cause of student failure: poor performances early in the learning process that put the student in so deep of a hole that recovering is not a reasonable possibility. As such, minimum grading targets a small but well-defined subgroup of students. Further, students who consistently post failing grades are not likely to benefit from minimum grading. Nor will students who consistently post good grades. Only students whose failing performances are intermittent, and who are now failed when their course grade is unfairly skewed by one or two failing performances, will benefit from receiving a minimum grade. (Carifio & Carey, 2013 p. 20)



The 4-Point Scale

Another approach to minimizing the negative effects of the 100-point scale is to use a 4-point scale instead. The 4-point scale should be familiar because it is most often used to calculate a grade point average or GPA.

The table below from *Grading for Equity* (Feldman, 2018 p. 89) compares the 100-point scale to the 4-point scale.

				Scores that	
				represent	% of scale that
		Scores that	% of scale that	meeting	represents
		representing	represents	standards (B or	meeting
	# of gradations	failing	failing	above)	standards
0–100 Point Scale	100	0–59	60%	80–100	21%
0–4 Point Scale	4	0	20%	3–4	40%

Nearly two thirds of the 0–100 point scale is dedicated to failure and one fifth to success, whereas in the 0–4 point scale, one fifth is dedicated to failure and two fifths to success.

In the 4-point scale a 4 = A, 3 = B, 2 = C, 1 = D, and 0 = F. Say a student has earned an 85 on two of three assignments and failed to pass on the third. On the 100-point scale, this student would earn 57% or an F (85 + 85 + 0/3). On the 4-point scale, the student would have earned two 3s (85 = B = 3) and one 0 for an average of 2 or a C.

If the goal of grades is to provide an accurate description of what students have learned, our grading scales and calculations should be mathematically correct and equitable.

Sources

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Use Inclusive Grading Practices to Increase Equity

Despite our best efforts to be objective, grading student work may involve personal biases. Implicit bias, stereotype threat, and even our previous experiences with a student can subconsciously impact our grading practices. The assessment and grading process can be impacted by instructor bias based on students' previous scores, work ethic, race, gender, or ethnicity (Malouff et al., 2013). For example, one study by Saul (2013) found that, when grading was not anonymous, men were more likely to be given higher grades than women for the same quality of work.

Bias in Assessment

The halo effect causes certain characteristics of students to be overemphasized and therefore have an unfair influence on the ultimate grade (Satyanarayana et al., 2019). For example, instructors may give the benefit of the doubt to a student who typically submits work on time and allow for an extension but hesitate to do so for a student who has previously submitted late work. Students' previous scores or work ethic may also be perceived subjectively and therefore influence the grading of an assignment. Anonymous grading can reduce the impact of that bias.

Using Anonymous Grading

Although biases cannot be eliminated completely, their impact on grading can be mitigated by the use of anonymous grading. In anonymous grading, student identifiers are removed from the work prior to instructor evaluation or grading. This practice can be shared with students prior to submission of the work or exam. The practice helps create inclusive learning environments in two ways. First, it reduces the possibility of instructor bias, and second, it can increase students' trust in the process and the accuracy of their grades. This is a significant factor to consider because research demonstrates that student performance is reduced when there is an expectation of bias or discrimination (Sue, 2010).

A downfall to the anonymous grading practice is not being able to acknowledge student progress throughout the course. One way to avoid this is to create assignments with multiple components in which some are graded anonymously. For example, students can be assigned an oral presentation or video assignment along with an essay. The video or presentation will not be graded anonymously, but the essay can be. Another option is to uncover student names after grades have been determined and then provide individual feedback on the assignment.

Anonymous Grading Examples

Anonymous grading	How to
Remove student names	Ask students to submit work using their student identification numbers instead of their names. This will remove instructor bias based on past performance as well as race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.
Use LMS settings	For online courses or courses that have an online component the learning management system is likely to include anonymous grading capabilities.

The table below includes suggestions for implementing anonymous grading.



Other Inclusive Grading Practices

Since anonymous grading is not always possible, here are two other suggestions designed to mitigate the impact of bias.

Grade one section or question at a time. Grading one question on an exam or one section of an assignment for the entire class at the same time can reduce the impact of instructor bias in assessments and help the instructor focus on the same criteria for the assessment for the entire class.

Grade all submissions before posting grades. Completing the grading of all submissions prior to posting grades will allow you to adjust grading if you find yourself changing your expectations as you grade. For example, on early submissions you may mark a question incorrect and find that the majority of your students are struggling with that same question. In this case, you may want to revisit the wording of the question or your expectations for a response.

Sources

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Assign Greater Weight to More Recent and Summative Evidence of Mastery

Summative assessments typically take place at the end of a unit, module, or course and are designed to determine if the student has learned the content or mastered the skills addressed in the unit, module, or course. Formative assessments and assignments serve to help students learn and develop skills while also providing feedback to the instructor and student regarding where students are meeting with success and where they may benefit from reteaching, additional resources, or further practice.

Formative assessments are designed to give students practice and the teacher feedback on student progress toward mastery. If we include grades from formative assessments, we are including "information while the student is in the midst of learning, including their mistakes" (Feldman, 2018 p. 142). The most accurate information about a student's mastery of course content is the summative assessments that occur after students have had the opportunity to practice and learn from their mistakes. "Equitable grading that is accurate and biased-resistant includes nothing other than a student's summative assessment results" (Feldman, 2018, p. 142).

Homework as Formative Assessments

In many classes, homework is scored and included as a significant part of the grade. The purpose of homework is to provide students with the opportunity to practice meeting course outcomes while receiving feedback on that practice. Grading homework and including those grades in the student's final grade can be especially damaging to struggling students who may initially make more mistakes and need more practice. It is better to reduce the stakes and encourage students to take risks and learn from those risks (O'Connor, 2010).

Use More Recent Evidence

Using more recent evidence of students' learning also helps to decrease the bias in traditional grading. When students initially struggle with content but master it by the end of the course, the averaged performance will inevitably be lower than their actual achievement, and the final grade will misrepresent the students' true level of content mastery (Feldman, 2019). This can be rectified by replacing earlier evidence of mastery with more recent evidence when calculating a final grade.

Low-Stakes Assignments

Consider using low-stakes assignments that are not as heavily weighted as summative assessments. The purpose of low-stakes assignments or assessments is to provide students with an opportunity to practice meeting course outcomes. Low-stakes assignments work best when students are able to receive feedback on their progress toward mastering course outcomes as well as an idea of the steps they should take to ultimately succeed in class (Warnock, 2013).

Types of low-stakes assignments include:

- **Quizzes:** Online quizzes that allow multiple attempts and provide immediate feedback are especially useful for students who might struggle.
- **Discussions:** Provide an opportunity for students to share and refine their current understanding of course concepts.
- Breaking down larger assignments: When assigning students a writing or research project, break down the elements of the project and assess one or more with a low-stakes assignment. Requiring students to submit their work-in-progress so they can receive early feedback and may be given a grade of low weight or even a grade that consists of a check or check-minus offers them an opportunity to learn from their mistakes before completing the larger assignment.



- Feldman, J. (2018). Grading for equity: What it is, why it matters, and how it can transform schools and classrooms. Corwin.
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Provide Opportunities to Use Feedback for Improvement

As instructors, we want to create a "safe" classroom where students can take risks and feel comfortable making mistakes. However, traditional grading practices often punish mistakes and make recovering from low grades early in the semester challenging if not impossible. Whereas grades can help students identify if they are achieving mastery, feedback guides them to take those next steps toward mastery, if they are given the opportunity to use it to improve.

As far back as 1968, Benjamin Bloom suggested that students receive one of two grades on formative assessments: "Mastery" or "Not Mastery" (Bloom, 1968). Bloom further explained that students in the "Not Mastery" or "Not Yet" category must receive feedback from teachers that identifies precisely what they are expected to learn, what they have learned well to that point, and what they need to learn better. Students can be encouraged to use feedback to improve the current assignment or incorporate feedback into their future work.

Using Feedback for Redos or Retakes

Learning depends on making mistakes and then having the opportunity to correct those mistakes. This process helps to motivate students to keep learning because they have a chance to recover from the initial performance and show improvement (Feldman, 2018).

To incorporate redos or retakes into your grading, consider the following questions posed by Joe Feldman in *Grading for Equity* (2018):

1. What score on an assessment qualifies a student for a retake?

It may be tempting to limit the ability to redo or retake assessments or assignments to students who, for example, score below a C. Is this an equitable approach if this student who earned a C- on the first assessment now scores a B+, higher than other students who were not allowed to redo? Should we limit the ability to continue learning to our lowest performing students?

To ensure equity in grading, every student should have the opportunity to continue learning and to improve their performance.

2. Should there be retakes on everything or only for certain assignments?

Redos for formative assessments such as homework are typically easy to accommodate. The purpose of formative assessments is to apply content and to practice skills, receive feedback, and improve. In these cases, asking students to apply the feedback and redo the work should result in deeper learning.

In some courses, students may be asked to create multiple assignments that are similar. For example, they may write five or six lab reports, or multiple reviews of readings. In these cases, it may be more effective and efficient to have students apply the feedback to future iterations of this assignment. You may even grade a subset of the total assigned so that students can use feedback on early assignments to improve their future work.

3. Should students retake the entire summative assessment or just the content they failed?

If the purpose of a summative assessment is to gather evidence of what the student knows, the retake would only involve the content the student did not master.

If our goal is mastery on course outcomes, and a student demonstrates that they have only mastered half of the content by scoring a 50% on an end-of-unit exam, we can either decide that



the student has stopped learning and enter the grade of 50% or we can use the summative assessment as a formative assessment opportunity and provide feedback and support to help them master the remaining 50% and provide a retake.

This approach can empower and motivate students as they realize that your goal is to help them learn and master the course outcomes.

Incorporating Feedback Into Future Work

Feedback improves student learning but only if they act on it. We can encourage students to use feedback by making sure they are motivated and equipped to act on it. Students often see feedback as criticism, and changing that perception can begin when you tell them that you provide feedback because you have high expectations for all of them and you are confident they can meet those expectations. When teachers share this viewpoint, students are more likely to resubmit work and receive higher grades (Yeager et al., 2014).

We can also encourage student use of feedback by:

- framing the feedback as positive by telling students, "Don't miss out on the chance to improve" (Fletcher-Wood, 2021)
- providing specific steps students can take to improve their work
- sharing specific resources such as links to citation generators, writing centers, and video tutorials students can use to address the feedback
- offering open office hours where students can drop in and discuss their feedback
- asking students to share how they used your feedback to improve the resubmission
- having students work in groups to process the feedback on an assignment

Sources

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Structure Opportunities for Students to Reflect on and Improve Their Performance

The way we grade should motivate students to achieve academic success, support a growth mindset, and give students opportunities for redemption (Feldman, 2018). Equitable grading means that we want students to be intrinsically motivated to learn, so our goal should be to help them focus on learning rather than on grades. Providing opportunities for them to reflect on and improve their performance is how we build students' self-regulation skills and sense of self-efficacy.

Exam Review

An exam review asks students to:

- 1. identify the questions they missed
- 2. explain why their answer is incorrect
- 3. explain why the correct answer is the correct answer and provide a reference for it

This process helps students correct their own misunderstandings and locate supporting evidence for the correct information. Consider allowing students to earn back points for questions they correct on an exam review (Freeman, 2022).

Exam Wrapper

Exam wrappers ask students to answer three questions: How did you prepare for the exam? What kinds of errors did you make on the exam? What could you do differently next time to prepare? They give students the opportunity to examine their preparation for the exam and plan to prepare more effectively in the future by:

- 1. identifying the strategies they used to prepare
- 2. analyzing the errors they made
- 3. Identifying how they might prepare differently as well as identifying areas of strength and weakness to guide further study

To use exam wrappers in your course, create an exam wrapper that simply asks the three questions above, or you can customize it by asking about specific resources you have provided in the course. Pass out the wrapper when you hand back graded exams and ask students to take 10 to 15 minutes to complete it. Although exam wrappers are not graded, you will want to collect them because you will be returning them to students before their next exam so they can use their own advice in preparing for the next exam (Lovett, 2013). The <u>Eberly Center at Carnegie</u> <u>Mellon University</u> provides examples of exam wrappers from different content areas.

Share Effective Studying Approaches

Help students use these five practices to improve their approach to studying:

- Make the most of your notes.
- Put it in your own words.
- Be an active reader.
- Schedule study sessions.
- Mix different types of problems.



Download the infographic "The Best Ways to Learn" on the Implementation Resources page for more effective studying approaches.

Analyze the Exam to See What Was Missed

Identify the questions that were most missed on an exam and reteach the content. Explain why each answer was incorrect and provide a rationale for the correct response. Include similar questions on the next exam. If students show mastery the second time around and you are using a standards-based gradebook, you can replace the initial grade with the new grade following the second exam.

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The Best Ways to Learn

STRATEGIES TO UP YOUR STUDYING GAME



1. MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NOTES

Review your notes as soon as possible after class. Fill in any missing information by consulting your text or asking classmates or your instructor for clarification. Spend time organizing your notes and making connections with content you have previously covered. Create flash cards for key vocabulary, facts, and content.

2. PUT IT IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Shortly after completing assigned readings or after reviewing your notes from class, take a few minutes to put the concepts studied in your own words. It can be very helpful to "teach" or explain the content to someone else. You can even pretend to teach others if your friends are not that interested in learning more about physics!





3. BE AN ACTIVE READER

Stop every few pages and ask yourself questions about what you just read. Turn section headings into questions and answer them in your own words. Make connections between what you read and what you have already learned. Create quiz questions that may appear on a test and write them on note cards for later use.

4. SCHEDULE STUDY SESSIONS

Set aside a few times each week to study for each course. Study your notes from the current class and then restudy notes from prior classes. Use your practice test questions and flash cards. Keep quizzing yourself until you can reliably recall the information and feel comfortable taking the questions and flash cards out of weekly rotation. Add them back in prior to any final





assessment.

5. MIX DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROBLEMS

When you practice two or more concepts at the same time, retrieval is harder but produces longer lasting learning and lets you apply what you are learning. For example, practicing different types of math problems makes you more skilled than working on a set of common problems.

SOURCES

Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning by Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel Teach Students How to Learn by Saundra McGuire What the Best College Students Do by Ken Bain Practice Tests, Spaced Practice and Successive Relearning: Tips for Classroom Use and for Guiding Students' Learning by John Dunlosky and Katherine A. Rawson

ACUE



Mitigate the Negative Impact of Late Work

"When teachers accept late work without penalty, grades are more accurate reflections of student academic performance and learning becomes more important than deadlines" (Feldman, 2018, p. 116). As we might suspect, no research supports the idea that assigning low grades as punishment encourages students to try harder or do better (Dueck, 2014; Guskey, 2000; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Marzano, 2000).

Penalties for late work distort the achievement record of students and can harm student motivation (O'Connor, 2010). Although we do want students to be responsible and submit assignments in a timely fashion, reducing grades for work that is submitted late distorts the student's grade because we are now grading behaviors, not academic achievement. For example, say a student turns in an assignment six days late and earns an 80. However, they receive a 50% because their grade was reduced by five points for each day the assignment was late. We now enter a 50 in the gradebook. This communicates that they have mastered 50% of the content. In fact, we know that they received an 80% on the content and lost 30 points because of behavior. The 50% is not an accurate representation of the level of their achievement.

"When teachers stop reducing grades on assignments submitted late, one of their biggest surprises is that they not only get more completed work—students who need more time use that time—but also that the quality of work increases. When students are allowed to have more time to complete assignments, they can work around unpredictable events or overpacked schedules, have less incentive to copy, and can take more pride in doing their best work" (Feldman, 2018, p. 116).

Below are some suggestions for handling late work.

Share the Importance of Due Dates

Explain to students that due dates help them stay on track and provide them with the opportunity to get timely and meaningful feedback they can use to apply to future assignments. Michelle Pacansky-Brock uses flexible deadlines but also explains to students the importance of keeping to deadlines because they help keep them on track. She uses the image of a bull's eye to explain her due dates and encourages students to hit the bull's eye, but if they miss, they should pick up the dart and try again. She also shares her experience with how challenging it can be for students who fall behind and shares her commitment to support them in meeting deadlines (Pacansky-Brock, 2022).

"Life Happens" Passes

Because things happen that may cause a student to miss a deadline every now and then, some teachers offer passes students can use to replace a missed assignment. Typically, these passes can only replace low-point assignments, not major ones, and generally only one to three passes per semester is recommended. Other instructors allow students to drop a low score in the gradebook. Another option is "Next Class Passes," which allow students one extra day to turn in work.

Extension Requests

On the due date, students can submit a written request for a deadline extension rather than taking points off. Most extension requests ask students to explain why they were unable to complete the assignment on time. This not only gives the students a chance to reflect on their habits, it also invites the teacher to help students solve larger problems that might be getting in the way of their academic success.



Schedule a Make-Up Day

Laura Schisler, PhD (2019) schedules a make-up day typically two weeks before finals for all of her classes and lists it in the syllabus. Limiting the day in which missed work can be submitted to one single day removes the challenge of tracking who owes what assignment for which class and by when. It also allows the instructor to not schedule additional assignments around the make-up day to avoid becoming overwhelmed trying to grade both on-time assignments and late work.

Give Late Work Full Credit

Some instructors accept all late work with no penalty, with the assumption that if the work is important, and if we want students to do it, we should let them hand it in whenever they get it done. Other instructors are concerned that this will cause more students to stop doing the work or delay submission until the end of a semester. The truth is that most students continue to turn work in more or less on time, and those who were late under the old system were still late under the new one. The big difference is that the instructor no longer has to spend time calculating deductions or determining whether students had valid excuses; the work is simply graded for mastery.

- Dueck, M. (2014). Grading smarter, not harder: Assessment strategies that motivate kids and help them learn. ASCD.
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