



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

The table below includes suggestions for implementing anonymous grading.

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.



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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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