



# ACUE

Student Success  
Through Exceptional  
Teaching

## 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.



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## 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.

## Sources

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