



## 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.

| Name | Course Outcome #1 |            |            | Level | Course Outcome #2 |            |            | Level | Course Outcome #3 |            |            | Level | Course Outcome #4 |            |            | Level |
|------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------|
|      | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date Grade |       | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date Grade |       | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date Grade |       | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date 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 |
|------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
|      | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date Grade |             | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date Grade |             | Date Grade        | Date Grade | Date 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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