



Expert Insights: Mitigating the Negative Impact of Late Work

Joe Feldman, EdM; Author & Consultant; Crescendo Education Group [00:00:11] Traditionally, what we do is we say, "OK, you handed this in on time; you get this grade. And when you hand it in late, even though the quality of the work was at a certain level, it's going to be decreased and downgraded because it was late." And this comes from a sense that we want students to have some kind of punishment for handing in something late, and we want to deter students from handing in late. We want to teach them to meet deadlines. And while those interests are important, we don't want to include those in the grade because we start to make a grade more inequitable when we do. First of all, we make the grade less accurate. So if a student who has B-quality performance hands it in on time and gets a B, and a student who has A-quality performance hands it in late and would have gotten an A, but then a B. Now you have two students who have very different levels of understanding but have identical grades because one handed it in late. And we don't want to have those two students have identical grades. In addition, when we include the lateness into a grade, we are disproportionately punishing students who are more likely to hand in something late. And who are the students who are more likely to hand in something late? Students who have fewer supports, more responsibilities, more interruptions to their lives. And we don't want to send the message to students that because you have these interruptions, your grade is going to be pulled down even if you have high quality performance. The third problem is, is that we actually cut off our nose to spite our face. What happens is, is that students do inferior quality work in order to meet the deadline. We're essentially saying, "Even if you could do better work and you could continue in your learning, we are going to prevent you from doing that because of the deadline." And what faculty find is when they allow students to hand in work after the deadline, they find that the quality of work goes up. The learning actually increases because they've allowed students to hand it in late. And what faculty start to recognize is that we care that students learned. We may actually deprioritize when they learn and whether they need to meet our timeline.

Ken O'Connor, MEd; Author and Consultant; Assess for Success Consulting, Inc [00:02:37] Faculty shouldn't reduce grades on late work because, again, that's a behavior. And I think there are really three problems with it. One is that it's a distortion of achievement. Second, if the penalties are severe, which sadly sometimes they are, it distorts motivation because after a very short period of time, there's no point in doing it. And the third problem, I think, with penalizing for lateness is that for the most part, it doesn't work. The same student hands things late in week three and week six and week nine. And if it doesn't work, it's an ineffective strategy. And there's not much point in using ineffective strategies.

Joe Feldman, EdM [00:03:25] A challenge with allowing students to turn work in late that faculty raise is that it becomes overwhelming, that "I'm getting work all the time and student and I can't keep track of all the students and now I have all this work that comes in at the end." And a way that they address this is by, first of all, thinking, "Well, is there going to be some final deadline? Do I want to make it where there's a certain grace period and then have a deadline?" So that's one option. The second is they actually use the late submission as an opportunity for the student to reflect on what that was like to do that. So in other words, when a student hands in something late, to have them think about why it was that they handed in late and how they had now, not only the late work to do, but new work to do and what that felt like. And those--to help the student internalize and recognize what those natural consequences are can be much more motivational for students than to simply say, "Well, because you didn't hand it in, you lose 10 points."

Ken O'Connor, MEd [00:04:34] Faculty can encourage students to submit work on time by simply indicating that that is the expectation, but also indicating that we understand that there are circumstances when that will not be possible. One of the best ways to do it, I think, is to say that we'll have a time frame, you know, not a specific date. Another thing that I think is really important is the possibility for extensions. To get an extension, a student should have to communicate with the professor. If students can request extensions, then they're exhibiting and we're developing in them that adult responsible behavior. And then I think it's quite reasonable for faculty to say, "Look,



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this is partly for me. I have the load of whatever you submit. I also have a life beyond teaching, and part of this is so that I can manage my time effectively." And I think that's a perfectly reasonable thing to say, and something hopefully that students will recognize is reasonable.

Joe Feldman, EdM [00:05:38] Sometimes the concerns are raised that, "Well, this actually allowing students to hand in work late doesn't really prepare them for the professional workplace." And there's a couple of ways to think about this that I think help faculty kind of think more broadly about what the professional world requires. So there are cases where the deadline is fixed. I've got to produce a video for a news segment and the news is coming on at 5:00, right? Or there's some like hard deadline that I cannot escape, right? I have to hand it in by then. The performance is at noon tomorrow, right? And there are cases like that. And there are a lot more cases in the professional world where deadlines are more flexible, right? I have to come to a particular meeting on time and I'm a couple minutes late. Or I need to submit a publication or a manuscript to be reviewed, and it takes an extra day or two or three days or four days, right? That happens all the time. And when that happens, there are consequences, right? When I hand in a manuscript late, then I now have this hanging over me and I feel this additional pressure and I've got still the rest of my work to do. Like, there are consequences, but the consequences are never "We're going to dock your salary one percent for that." More often, it's where if it happens frequently, a manager will come or a supervisor will start to have a feedback conversation: "Well, tell me a little bit. I've noticed that you handed it in this late. What happened? What can I do? What's a good plan so this doesn't happen again?" If it happens many more times, maybe they say, "Well, we need to create a plan together to improve your performance." And it's only at the very end of the day that it has such large consequences as salary or formal evaluation. And let's remember that these are people still in the learning process. This is the chance actually for them to make mistakes in their time management, to recognize what happens to them, and how they feel when they turn in something late. And it's the right place for them to learn and be forgiven and to allow for their grade to still remain an accurate description of where they are in their learning. So that when they get to the professional world, they will have learned lessons in the safe space of the university or college.