



ACUE

Student Success
Through Exceptional
Teaching

Expert Insights: Using Standards-Based Grading

Joe Feldman, EdM; Author & Consultant; Crescendo Education Group [00:00:10] Traditionally, student performance is described by a ratio of points. I've gotten 80 out of 100 points or 80 percent, so I have a B-minus. And what more equitable grading is is where we're more transparent and explicit about what our learning outcomes are. So you don't have to get 90 percent of all the points possible throughout the entire term across all different content and tasks. Instead, you have to be able to demonstrate a certain level of understanding of these 10 course outcomes.

Ken O'Connor, MEd; Author and Consultant; Assess for Success Consulting, Inc [00:00:48] Using categories that are based on assessment methods or activities is, I think, problematic because all you get out of it is information about whether the student can do tests, whether they can do assignments, whether they can actually do whatever that the nature of that assessment was. We have no information or very limited information about the actual learning goals, what the students, what do they know, what do they understand, what can they do? And so I think we can have inaccurate measurement of student achievement if we use categories like tests, projects, and assignments because what may happen is—and especially if we're thinking it in terms of you know pass-fail kind of a percentage—is a student may be able to get 61 percent, let's say 60, and not know and understand a lot. They may be very strong in some areas and very weak in others. And do we really see that as acceptable as being, getting a credit? I mean, if we think about things where certification takes place, pilots, plumbers, electricians, they have to be proficient in everything to get, in a sense, "credit." And it seems to me that the same principle should apply to whatever students are learning. It's not good enough to just have 61 percent and be really strong in some areas and very weak in others. There should be some sort of minimal level of proficiency in everything. And we have that information when we organize by learning goals. We don't have that information when we organize by methods of assessment.

Joe Feldman, EdM [00:02:27] When we do that and the grade represents a student's level of understanding of course outcomes, it can change how we even organize our grade book. So rather than say, "I'm going to have a category for homework and classwork and tests and the final or projects, what I instead do is organize my grade book by content area." So I'm teaching a particular content area on kinetic energy, right? So that is one category in my grade book. And when students have different assessments within that, I'm going to describe their level of performance against the proficiency scale, right? What is A-level understanding of kinetic energy? B-level, C-level, D-level? And as I get data from students through my assessments, I'll be able to constantly update where every student is in their learning. So on this quiz, the student showed C-plus-level understanding of kinetic energy concepts. But on this next test, they showed B-level. So now in my grade book, I had a C-plus, and now I'm going to overwrite that and put it as a B because my grade book then always shows where students are in their learning most currently. I'm always having up-to-date information in my grade book about where students are in their learning. And then when that is reported to students or when they have access to that, they see where they are in real time. "Oh, right now I am at a C-plus-level in my understanding of kinetic energy. I'm going to look at the proficiency scales or at the rubrics, and I'm going to see what that corresponds to and what I need to do to get a B-level. And there's another assessment coming up in two weeks, so I know what I need to focus on. When I take that assessment, let's see if I can get a B-level. Oh, and I had a B-level and now look, my grade book or the grade book I have access to now shows that I'm at a B-level understanding. Let me look at what it takes to get an A-level, and when do I have another assessment event that I can then have the opportunity to demonstrate that?" And then it becomes much more a sense among students around "I have a sense of efficacy and ownership and understanding in real time of where I am in my learning and what I can focus on." And it invests and motivates them in a much deeper way than just chasing points.