

Assessment/Grading — who, what, why

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Abstract

Assessment, grading, evaluating, call it what you may, it is a many-faceted beast, with a lot of players involved and many expectations (not all of which are compatible). We examine the basics, look at the partnership with teaching assistants and graders, then finish the tour with students “grading” the instructor. We leave more questions unanswered than answered.



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Some Quotes from *McKeachie's Teaching Tips*

a great little book, now in its 14th edition, published by Cengage Learning

- “What students learn depends as much on your tests and methods of assessment as on your teaching.”
- “Assessment is not synonymous with testing.”
- “After the course is over, students will not be able to depend on you to assess the quality of their learning.”
- “. . . assessment is *not* simply an end-of-course exercise to determine student grades.”
- “. . . tests are among the most frustrating aspects of the course to many students and arouse a great deal of overt and covert aggression.”

Is it really a surprise that students focus on grades!?



Adding Fuel to the Fire with the Words We Choose!

The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th Ed.

as·sess·ment

- n.* 1. The act of assessing, appraisal.

grade

- n.* 2. A position in a scale of size, quality, or intensity: *a poor grade of lumber.*
... 6. A number, letter, or symbol indicating a student's level of accomplishment.

WordNet (R), Princeton University

as·sess·ment

- n.* 1. The classification of someone or something with respect to its worth.



Selecting Our Words (and Reasons) Carefully

for·ma·tive

adj.

. . . Susceptible to transformation by growth and development.

sum·ma·tive

adj.

. . . Aggregation, of a conclusive nature.

- Is “homework” largely formative?
- Are exams only summative?
- Why do we “grade” formative assignments?
- Why might we *not* grade a summative instrument?
- How should all of the pieces fit into a final semester grade?
- One exam, end of the semester, that’s it, a grade?
- Gaussian distribution grading versus mastery grading: **VERY** different! 



University Regulation 2-106 – Grading System . . .

Grade	Grade Points	Definition
A	4.000	(old language: Exceptional)
B	3.000	(old language: Very Good)
C	2.000	(old language: Fair)
D	1.000	(old language: Poor)
F	0.000	Failure
I	None	Incomplete
W	None	Withdrawal
S/U	None	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory

- Grading with pluses and minuses eliminated as of 6/12/2019
- How is this interpreted in terms of percentage of a “score?”
- What other ramifications-to-the-student are attached to grades?
 - The GPA (scholarship, loans, probationary status).
 - Failure to achieve satisfactory progress.
 - Undergraduate versus graduate expectations.



Working with Teaching Assistants and Graders and Grades

- The instructor of the course (you!) has the responsibility for. . .
 - the final course grade,
 - the sequence of formative and summative assessments,
 - clear, concise instructions detailing the “scoring” and “feedback” provided with each assignment.
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): federal law regarding grades!
 - Make sure you’re familiar with this to avoid unintentional trouble!!!
 - see <http://www.uwyo.edu/registrar/ferpa/>
- According to FERPA, the instructor is the institutional officer responsible for safeguarding the privacy of student information, including “grades,” and all personal information.
 - Pros, cons and legality of posting student scores in public venues?



Rubrics: Keeping Everyone on the Same Page

- The word *rubric* has multiple definitions. . .
 - an established mode of conduct, rule, or procedure; protocol
 - an explanatory comment
 - a direction for the conduct of “divine service”
 - **a guide listing specific criteria for grading or scoring of academic papers, projects, or tests**
- Lots of “pros” for writing and applying rubrics. . .
 - Establish your expectations at the outset
 - Provide clear instructions for yourself and TA/grader and students
 - Allow for return to situation even after protracted departure
- Can be extremely detailed or quite brief, depends on needs. . . example?

For further investigation. . .

Moskal, Barbara M. (2000). Scoring rubrics: what, when and how?. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 7(3). Retrieved July 12, 2019 from <https://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7%26n=3>



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When the Tables Are Turned

- Students evaluate instructors each and every semester in each and every course, more or less (see University Regulation 2-5 for details).
- How accurate is student evaluation of . . .
 - teaching effectiveness,
 - fairness of the classroom and academic task,
 - expressed attitude of the instructor to the course and students?
- How are student evaluations utilized?
 - Formative?
 - Summative?
- Persistent myths (yes, myths!) of grade inflation and student evaluations

