

## Grading: Approaches and Strategies

### Assignment Grading

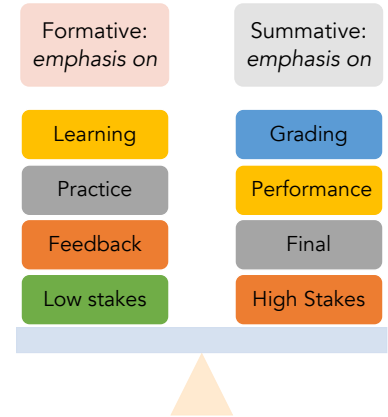
Two types of assessments: formative and summative

Formative: Assessment (or feedback) which informs students' subsequent learning

- low-stakes or no stakes (e.g. problem sets, group work, low-value / no value quizzes)
- feedback to you
- feedback to your students

Summative: Assessment (or feedback) which gives a final judgement or evaluation of proficiency, such as grades or scores

- tend to be higher stakes assessments
- e.g. exams, midterms
- determined by your learning outcomes
- must reflect activities and formative assessments



### Best Practices:

- Give frequent, low-stakes assessments with immediate feedback so students can improve
- Assessments should be meaningful and purposeful: questions should be authentic
- Assignments should be transparent to student: explain the "why", the "how", and the criteria for success, as in a grading rubric
- Course grading should support a "growth" orientation to learning – allow improvement over time (consider testing on a topic more than once / offering retests without penalty)

*Help students see how to be successful on your assignments and give them opportunities to improve over time.*

### Steps for Creating a Grading Rubric

Learning Outcomes	How many criteria and levels?	Decide weighting and points	Specify your criteria	Test Your rubric
What are your learning outcomes for the assignment? These outcomes should be observable or measurable. How do you differentiate good from poor performance?	If your levels are too fine, it will be difficult to be objective.	What weighting will you give to each criteria category? How many points will your intermediate and lowest achievement levels earn?	Give specific criteria for success at the highest level and then adjust language for lower levels.	Use old assignments or your idea of what students might submit to grade with your new rubric. Does it reflect what you are aiming for?

*Final step: Communicate your expectations to students. Hand out the rubric with the assignment description*

## Course Grading

Several approaches:

- Percentage / grade cut-offs
- Mastery
- Specifications
- Contract

**NOTE: It is strongly recommended that you do not grade on a curve. All students should have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery and earn a fair grade.**

Mastery (Criterion-referenced)	Specifications	Contract
Students meet required benchmarks and grade is calculated on number of benchmarks reached (rubrics apply here)	Course grades reflect the specifications for that grade: either more “hurdles” jumped (breadth), the height of the hurdles (depth), or both. Most assignments graded pass/fail. Revision options are important!	Final letter grade based on meeting requirements in a contract – little to no grades on assignments

Some problems with traditional grading approaches:

- Course grade may not reflect actual student learning (For example, an early low grade on an exam continues to influence the course grade even when the student masters the material later OR partial credit on problems mask students’ poor understanding of material.)
- Grades rarely focus on student growth. They tend to demotivate students to go back and learn material they didn’t do well on, especially if that material won’t be tested again.
- Serves primarily as extrinsic motivation...and does not develop nor feed into a student’s intrinsic motivation.
- They are not student-centered. Traditional grading approaches often focus on easy ways for faculty to judge students rather than a measure of student learning. Learning is expected to happen in a timeframe determined by the instructor rather than by the student – some students need a little longer to master content.

If you change your grading system from the more traditional approach, it is important to...

- Build student trust in the process – it’s new to them and can be disconcerting. Communicate what you are doing and why you are doing it – do this over time and in

several different ways. Examples: Overview on first day, how exam grading works before the first exam, hand back the exam and review again, review when approaching the end of the term, etc.

- Be willing to iterate over time. You don't need to change everything at once.

Four pillars of alternative grading:

- Clear standards
  - Helpful feedback
  - Marks (grades) that indicate progress
  - Reassessments without penalty
- ...all in support of feedback loops.

### Resources:

Teaching for Student Success Podcast Episode 28: Alternative Grading: Working With Students, Not Against Them with David Clark and Robert Talbert

(<https://www.teachingforstudentsuccess.org/episodes/talbert-clark>)

Nilson, Linda, "Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time", 2015

Sample grading rubric for specifications grading of assignments:

