

Grading and Assessment

For teachers, grading is often the old ball and chain. It sucks untold hours and is minefield of questions: What should I assess? How do I do so fairly? How do I present every student with the opportunity to succeed without sacrificing rigor? One way to think about it is as follows. Do we, as teachers, give assignments and grade the results so as to have something to mark down on report cards or to truly explore what our students understand and how they are best able to present their knowledge to us? If our goal is the former than the standard regime of tests and quizzes should suffice but, if (as is hopefully the case) we are aiming for the latter, we need to think carefully about how to assess in ways that accurately measure student learning not just at the end of a cycle of teaching but throughout; we need to make sure our assessments have real world applications, and perhaps most importantly we need to ensure that we offer a variety of assessments to ensure that every student has the opportunity to demonstrate what they know.



In this section, Katherine Greybeal, Emily Voit, and Jessie Gerson discuss assessment strategies from the nitty gritty of how to avoid spending your life marking papers to current best practice. Taken together, they provide an overview of how to make your assessment strategies fair, interesting, and time effective.

Fair and Sane Grading and Assessment Strategies

General Info:

- Don't plan on grading everything you hand out to students—you will go crazy!
- You don't need to tell your students that you are not going to grade an assignment if you think that it will reduce their motivation—even if you throw the papers away and students ask, make something up—eventually, students will forget.
- Alternately, if you are working with students who have low academic confidence you can tell them that work will be graded on effort and completion rather than correctness. You know your students and you will be able to tell what will motivate them best.
- Be punctual when handing things back, especially tests—students will want to know their grades. The longer the interval between the time the assignment is handed in and the time it is returned, the less impact it will have on your students.
- Provide students with a grading scale—they will want to know how they are being graded....and so will many of their parents!

Methods:

- Effort/participation—grade students on attempts at work (trying vs. rushing), how will they contribute in class to discussions, activities, etc. If you are using this form of grading make sure to be explicit with your class about your expectations to make sure that you are being fair. Try giving a rubric of expectations for your students. (i.e. Full effort: eyes on page at all times. Not talking. Pencils moving. Partial effort: Eyes sometimes on page. Occasionally talking. Sometimes writing. etc.)
- Completion—give them credit for doing the work and turning it in. This will be especially helpful when dealing with homework and will help you get to bed on time!
- Alternate—for example, if they complete an assignment have each student answer one question from it, if they get it right they get 100, if they miss they lose points and get another chance, etc.
- Differentiated and student specific—Fair is not always equal. If you have a student who struggles in your content area or a student who excels and consistently finishes early, realize that you do not have to grade every student the same way. You can privately inform a student that you expect him or her to complete a certain amount of an assignment or complete it in a slightly different way. Every student should be able to succeed in your classroom so long as they are working their hardest.

What to Grade:

- When we think about grading we tend to focus on tests, quizzes, homework etc. But in fact you should be examining a wide range of student performances when you grade. For

example, a student who freezes up on tests might be able to create an excellent model of the science concept you are trying to teach.

- Try to grade in ways that reflect the way students would use concepts in the real world. This is known as *Alternative Assessment* and can include portfolios of writing samples, creating a book explaining a math concept for children etc.

Types of Grading:

- Summative Assessment refers to the assessment that happens at the end of a unit or cycle of learning. It can serve the dual purpose of assessing a student's knowledge and the success of the unit and, ideally, provide meaningful closure opportunity. Examples of summative assessments could include a cumulative test, a group performance, or a portfolio piece.
- Formative Assessment refers to assessments of understanding that take place within a unit or cycle of learning. Examples of formative assessment include exit slips taken at the end of day or a rough draft of a writing piece. Any material you are assessing that does *not* function as a final unit assessment is probably a formative assessment. Formative assessment is important because it allows you to evaluate student understanding while you are teaching rather than once you are finished. Through formative assessment you can learn how well students are mastering material and what you need to re-teach rather than penalizing them for the lack of that very knowledge at the end of the unit.
- Formal Assessment refers to the gathering of official and, generally, graded information on a student's learning such as quizzes, tests, and homework.
- Informal Assessment refers to information on student learning deduced in a non-systematic way for example by listening to the student during a class discussion.
- Self-Assessment refers to having student reflect on their own learning either through a rubric, a rough grade, paragraph or a scoring guide. Self-assessment can go hand in hand with does not have to replace a teacher-given grade. Rather it serves the dual purpose of helping students develop reflective skills and allowing you insight into how they believe they have been performing. You will be struck by their honesty!
- Alternative assessment (see "What to Grade")

Rubrics:

- A rubric is a grid used to grade student work fairly and clearly. It indicates the expectations for high, medium and low grades. (See attached)
- A rubric is generally provided to students prior to an assignment to make sure that they know what is expected of them.
- It can be very helpful to have students self-assess using your rubric prior to turning in their first draft.
- Using rubrics makes it easy for you and your students—faster to grade and informs students, but you don't need to use one all the time.
- Websites: <http://rubistar.4teachers.org> ; www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/

Scoring Guide

- A scoring guide serves the same purpose as a rubric through a different format. A scoring guide is a list of expectations for an assignment followed by the total possible points available for meeting that expectation. (See attached.)

- A scoring guide can allow the teacher to be more specific in their requirements for an assignment.
- Some teachers use a scoring guide for first drafts and a rubric for second drafts.
- Like a rubric, be sure to provide students with the scoring guide in advance and with both rubrics and scoring guides be prepared to teach students how to use these tools.

Politics and Realities

- School policies regarding failing students—be prepared for disappointment/frustration regarding grading. Some schools have a maximum percentage of students who can be failed and the rest must be passed regardless of performance.
- Your administration may be very supportive of how you choose to grade students or it may not be. You *will* get parental complaints and it is helpful to know where your administration stands in advance.
- There are special rules regarding grading ECE students. Speak to an collaborating or ECE teacher to ensure that you are being fair and are in compliance.

Progress reports/Report cards

- Progress reports refer to informal grades that go home in between report cards.
- Report cards refer to the formal grades that go on students permanent records.
- The frequency of progress reports and report cards depends on the county.
- Keep up with the grading, so you are not stressed out the night before.
- Programs—if you have the opportunity to use a computer program for grading, take advantage—it makes averaging much easier (JCPS online gradebook, Gradekeeper, etc.)
- Whether you are using a hardcopy or online grade book, don't fill out names for the first couple of weeks as your classes will probably change a fair amount.
- Be prepared for the fact that students come and go over the course of the year and you will need to alter your grade book and forward grades to other schools.
- Make comments regarding the grades—students and parents appreciate (note: try to say something good with the bad when possible)
- Let parents know prior to progress reports/report cards if student is in danger of failing—this protects you as well as informs students and their families.

Late work/absences

- Know the school policies and know your team policies. Consistency is half the battle when dealing with students.
- Inform students of the school's policy and/or your own policy. It is helpful to include this information in your syllabus right off the bat.
- Giving zeros is a loaded issue as it has a huge effect on students' GPAs. Realize that homework may not be done for a range of reasons from laziness to serious family responsibilities and issues.
- Extra credit/enrichment—up to you—take into consideration the student(s) and the type of assignment; if you offer it for one, offer it for all.

Question and Answer: Grading and Assessment

Q: Do you tell the students when you collect an assignment that you will not be grading it or that you did not grade it?

A: Never.

Q: How do you assign points?

A: That is within your discretion. The content departments or teams do not regulate how you award points or your system of grading.

Q: What's the difference between a rubric and a scoring guide?

A: A rubric is more tied to specific point values, where as a scoring guide has a range of points that a student could receive for meeting the criteria with various degrees of effort and expertise.

Glossary of Terms: Grading and Assessment

- **Differentiated Assessment** – Refers to tailoring your grading and assignments to meet and support individual students needs and abilities.
- **Formal Assessment** – Refers to the gathering of official and, generally, graded information on a students learning such as quizzes, tests, and homework.
- **Formative Assessment** – Refers to assessments of understanding that take place within a unit or cycle of learning. Examples of formative assessment include exit slips taken at the end of day or a rough draft of a writing piece. Any material you are assessing that does *not* function as a final unit assessment is probably a formative assessment.
- **Informal Assessment** – Refers to information on student learning deduced in a non-systematic way for example by listening to the student during a class discussion. *On Demand Writing* refers to a series of writing prompts found in Kentucky State Assessments which ask students to demonstrate mastery of various writing forms on the spot. An example would be “In an article for your school newspaper, tell about a time when knowing the rules was important.”
- **Open Response Questions** – Refer to writing prompts found in Kentucky State assessments. that are intended to function as a diagnostic of critical thinking skills, writing as well as content mastery. They generally include a multi-part prompt, for example: “This passage from *Brian’s Winter* tells the story of an adventure in the wilderness. A. Identify two events that are described in the passage. B. Compare the feelings that Brian had during each of these events. Use details from the passage to support your answer.”
- **Peer-Assessment** – Refers to having students look over, reflect, and write reflectively on other students’ work.
- **Portfolio Assessment** – Refers to the use of writing pieces as summative assessment tools. Portfolios are also state assessed by the state of Kentucky in the seventh grade.
- **Project-Based Assessment** – Refers to summative assessment that focuses not on tests but on real world application of learned skills through hands on demonstration.
- **Rubric** – A grid used to grade student work fairly and clearly. It indicates the expectations for high, medium and low grades.
- **Self-Assessment** – Refers to having student reflect on their own learning either through a rubric, a rough grade, paragraph or a scoring guide.
- **Scoring Guide** – A scoring guide is a list of expectations for an assignment followed by the total possible points available for meeting that expectation.
- **Summative Assessment** – Refers to the assessment that happens at the end of a unit or cycle of learning. It can serve the dual purpose of assessing a student’s knowledge and the success of the unit and, ideally, provide meaningful closure opportunity. Examples of summative assessments could include a cumulative test, a group performance, or a portfolio piece.