

Tips for Fair and Efficient Grading

GSI Teaching & Resource Center

PREPARATION

- Establish and communicate clear grading policies via a section syllabus and in-class discussion.
 - Do you accept late or incomplete assignments? If so, is there an automatic penalty?
 - Do you accept requests for re-grades? If so, does the request have to be submitted in writing with an explanation of why they think they earned a different grade? Can a re-grade actually lower their assignment score?
 - Do the students have a waiting period (24-hours? Longer?) before they can ask about an assignment grade? Can these questions be submitted via email or must they be asked in office hours? Is there a cut-off date (one week, two weeks?) for grading queries?
- Identify the learning objective(s) for the assignment; know what you're assessing.
 - What are the students supposed to know or demonstrate? How can this assignment provide feedback (to the professor, to the GSI and to the students) on the achievement of learning objectives?
 - Communicate these learning objectives to the students.
- Design/develop assignments (if possible) that effectively and accurately assess student achievement of learning objectives for the course and/or section (or lab or studio).
- Inform students of your expectations of the assignments content and quality. Consider distributing a grading rubric to your students in advance. Perhaps even consider developing a grading rubric with your students.
- Consider developing an assignment checklist/cover page that students must submit with their assignment. Could include: checklist of technical requirements; confirmation that this assignment is their own, original work (with signature), etc.

GRADING RUBRICS

Using grading rubrics can help align the grading process with the course's overall learning objectives. Well-developed rubrics can make grading transparent, consistent, efficient, and fair. Using a rubric can add to your confidence in the grades you assign and allow you to discuss grading openly and thoughtfully with your students to motivate their learning and help them correct any mistakes.

- Develop a grading rubric that appropriately reflects the targeted learning objectives and assignment prompt. If possible, consult with a professor, another GSI or the GSI Teaching & Resource Center as you develop your rubric.
- Your expectations of the assignment's content and quality (its scope, depth, breadth and execution) should be integrated into the rubric alongside your expected level of student understanding.
- Tell your students that you're using a rubric and show the criteria by which their assignments will be graded.
- Test your rubric out on a sample of student work and revise if necessary.

CONSISTENCY AND FAIRNESS

- Consider "blind grading." Have students identify their work with their student ID number instead of their name, or cover up the names while you grade.
- Keep accurate records of grades and student performance. Update grading spreadsheets regularly and in a timely manner.
- If the assignment contains multiple parts or sections (multiple choice, short answer and essay, for example) consider grading one section at a time. This should save time, mental energy and enhance consistency.
- Use post-it notes or pencil to mark initial scores, save the ink for the final grade once you've finished all grading and reviewed your distribution.

- Consider integrating aspects of peer review so that students have a better understanding of the grading process and the challenges of grading consistently and fairly.
- After grading:
 - Review several assignments from early in the grading process and make sure you still agree with your initial assessment.
 - Survey your distribution of grades and ask whether your scores match your impression of your students' submitted work. Share your distribution with the course's other GSIs (if appropriate) to ensure consistency. Consider meeting as a group, exchange a few assignments and compare what scores you would have given.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Grading is often a time-consuming and stressful process. Although we'd all like to finish as quickly as possible, effective grading is much more akin to a marathon than a sprint; it tests your mental and physical endurance. Use some of the tips and strategies below to grade more efficiently without sacrificing consistency, fairness, your confidence in the grades you assign, or your ability to provide meaningful and constructive feedback to your students.

- Start grading as soon as possible, while the task is fresh. Putting it off only encourages stress and dread.
- Use a rubric. The investment of a little time up front will pay dividends during the actual grading.
- Pay attention to your own mental and physical needs.
 - Grade comfortably (think posture, location, atmosphere, etc.).
 - Make sure you've got drinks or snacks, whatever it takes to keep you focused and energized.
- Set goals related to the time (on average) you'd like to spend per assignment. Reward yourself for achieving those goals. (For example, agree to spend an average of 15 minutes per assignment and set a goal of four assignments per hour. Upon achieving your goal you get chocolate).
- Take breaks to recharge and refocus.
- Consider grading with other GSIs from the course to access their input on grading questions.

EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

- Prioritize! Comment on essentials; do not give exhaustive feedback on every thought or problem. If a problem is recurring, mark it once and note it in your comments as an issue that persists throughout the assignment.
- Use a standardized feedback form to limit/guide your comments.
- Use shorthand/codes (editing marks for instance) and inform students what the symbols/codes indicate.
- Perhaps use the bspace assignment section to review and send feedback.
- With feedback that would require lengthy explanation, just write "See me." Keep a record of who should see you and remind them if they forget.
- Be aware of your tone. Students respond best to polite, constructive and clear comments. Highlight the strengths of their work in addition to areas for improvement.
- Ditch the red pen; it's anxiety inducing.
- Consider responding to students using their names and include your own name at the end of your comments.
- Discuss common problems with the class as a whole, or create a handout to address the problems.
- Consider providing your students with sample 'A' answers to help them understand their own grade.
- Invite (and listen to) your students' feedback and questions about grading.

Assessing student work and evaluating student performance is complex skill that we hone over time through experience. Experiment with different strategies, rubrics and assignments until you find something that works for

you. Always take the opportunity to gather feedback from students and colleagues in order to improve your grading techniques.

Further Reading:

- Walvoord, Barbara and Virginia Johnson Anderson (1998). "Managing the Grading Process." Chap. 2 in *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. This chapter provides a list of basic principles to make grading both more effective and more efficient.
- Davis, Barbara Gross (2009, 1993). *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Several chapters of the 1993 edition can be found on line through the [Office of Educational Development](#) website. The entire book can be accessed electronically if you are using a computer connected to the UC Berkeley Campus student network. Alternatively, you can check either edition of the book out from the GSI Teaching & Resource Center's library (301 Sproul Hall). Chapters on grading include:
 - [Quizzes, Tests, and Exams](#)
 - [Allaying Students' Anxieties About Tests](#)
 - [Grading Practices](#)

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