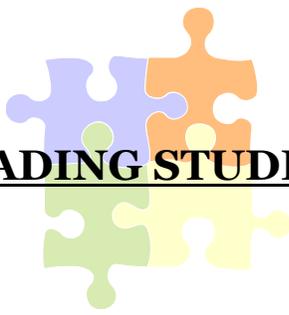


## 6. GRADING STUDENTS



### Debunking Grades

Most people have an idea of what constitutes an “A” versus a “C” student. It is not enough to just have an idea, however. You, your colleagues and your professor must all have the exact same idea of what constitutes an average student versus what constitutes a great student.

#### **The “A” Student - An Outstanding Student**

**Attendance** - “A” students have virtually perfect attendance. Their commitment to the class resembles that of the teacher.

**Preparation** - “A” students are prepared for class. They read the assignment. Their attention to detail is such that they occasionally catch the teacher in a mistake.

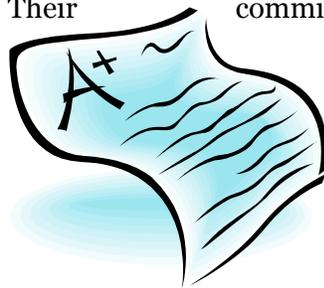
**Curiosity** - “A” students show interest in the class and in the subject. They look up or dig out what they don't understand. They often ask interesting questions or make thoughtful comments.

**Retention** - “A” students have retentive minds. They are able to connect past learning with the present. They bring a “backdrop” with them to class.

**Attitude** - “A” students have a winning attitude. They have both the determination and the self-discipline necessary for success. They show initiative. They do things they have not been told to do.

**Talent** - “A” students have something special. It may be exceptional intelligence and insight. It may be unusual creativity, organizational skills, commitment - or a combination thereof. These gifts are evident to the teacher and usually to the other students as well.

**Results** - “A” students make high grades on tests - usually the highest in the class. Their work is a pleasure to grade.



commitment to  
always  
subject.  
ask

## The “C” Student - An Average or Typical Student

**Attendance** - “C” students miss class frequently. They put other priorities ahead of academic work. In some cases, their health or constant fatigue renders them physically unable to keep up with the demands of high - level performance.

**Preparation** - “C” students prepare their assignments consistently but in a perfunctory manner. Their work may be sloppy or careless. At times, it is incomplete or late.

**Attitude** - “C” students are not visibly committed to the class. They participate without enthusiasm. Their body language often expresses boredom.

**Talent** - “C” students vary enormously in talent. Some have exceptional ability but show undeniable signs of poor self-management or bad attitudes. Others are diligent but simply average in academic ability.

**Results** - “C” students obtain mediocre or inconsistent results on tests. They have some concept of what is going on but clearly have not mastered the material.

## **Grading Papers**

As important as it is for you to know how to evaluate a student’s paper, it is equally as important for the students to know how you will be evaluating them. The first step of grading papers begins before any papers are handed in and that is to fully inform your students about the assignment.

First of all, consult with the faculty members as to the criteria of the assignment and how it will be graded. You have an obligation to your students to fully understand this information before you present the assignment so that you can answer questions correctly and clearly.

Secondly, consider distributing a marking scheme. Develop one with your professor or with your fellow TAs. Let your students know what qualifies as an A paper and so on. This technique can help guide the students’ writing and will help you maintain consistency in your marking from assignment to assignment.

### **Some Standard Ways of Scoring**

According to Weimer (1994), there are three standard ways of scoring essays, or even projects, anecdotal records, checklists and ratings. The best marking will implement a combination of all three so that students get the maximum amount of feedback.

**Anecdotal Records** - When reviewing the project, jot down notes. This method is thorough, but it is not objective in terms of maintaining consistency across students. It is also difficult to simply translate these notes into grades of A, B, C and so on. Use this to give your students your initial impressions about their work.

**Checklists** - With this method, a list of criterion is established in the form of a rubric. When you are marking the paper, you can simply check off if the student has satisfactorily met that criteria or not (i.e. spelling is acceptable or unacceptable; the APA format is either satisfactory or not satisfactory; a complete references page has been included, etc.). This method is more objective because the whole class is evaluated based on the criteria. Deriving a mark is fairly straight forward because all you have to do is total up the marks awarded each category. Using rubrics works well for grading criteria such as spelling, citing, grammar, title pages, reference pages and other specific requirements.

**Ratings** - A pre-set continuum could also be used in marking papers. For instance, you could give a rating from 1 to 5 for if the student properly and thoroughly interwove course material into the paper. Simply add up each student’s score for a final paper grade. This method allows you to examine every student’s work in the same way, but you use a much more detailed scoring method.

## **Grading Participation**

It is important, especially when a teaching first year class, to define what you mean by participation. Is it just saying anything? Or is it saying something the instructor feels is meaningful (and in that case, what would constitute a meaningful answer)? When it comes down to giving a grade, is it going to be based on how many checkmarks they have (i.e.: how many times they said something and you recorded it)? Or are you going to base it on how much you remember of each student at the end of the semester? Is it going to be based on a rating out of ten that you have compiled after each class in regards to their performance every seminar? Or will it be based on how many times they showed up to seminar or lab?

As you can see, evaluating participation can be very complicated. You must decide *before* the first class how you will be evaluating your group's participation. Then, you must tell them so that they know what is expected. Some professors have a specific way they wish you to evaluate so you must work within that structure (although you certainly can make suggestions). If your professor does not have any specific requirements, decide yourself and then share your ideas with your fellow colleagues.

## **Keeping a Journal**

Journals are different from diaries which are designed to regularly record activities, thoughts and dreams that are private and personal. A student journal is not psychological, although it does provide an outlet to record feelings in the class. Essentially, journaling is an intellectual activity where the student reflects on the class so that he or she can explain personal experiences and observations from a particular disciplinary perspective. (Weimer, 1992)

Journals are valuable because they can give you an indication of the extent of each student's level of higher learning. Students can, in their journals, apply information from the course and the readings to their own lives and re-evaluate their way of looking at the world and others: "it encourages students to think and requires an articulation of their thoughts." (p.5) The journal, therefore, makes education personal. Journals also help to improve student writing.

## **Grading Tests, Quizzes, Assignments**

When you are marking tests and quizzes, you want to make sure you are marking them fairly and consistently. To mark fairly:

- Do not look at the students' names so that you avoid biases.
- Have a marking scheme and stick to it.
- Make sure you are in a positive frame of mind.
- Start marking as soon as you can after assignments are handed in (if you put it off, you may find yourself marking when you do not want to, when you are sick, or when you have other things due).
- To be consistent, try to mark everything in one sitting, or at least make sure you have enough time to mark one question in one sitting.
- Try to mark without interruptions: if your mood changes, your marking will be affected.

## **Methods of Evaluation**

The following methods of evaluation are provided with thanks to Connolly, CTLET and Anna Lathrop, Physical Education.



Maureen

## **Evaluation of Student Work**

Evaluation should not be a guessing game, for you or the students. Let students know how they will be evaluated and how they can achieve good marks. What follows are examples of evaluation criteria and guidelines that can be given to students.

## **Criteria That Can Be Used to Evaluate Student Performance**

### **Content:**

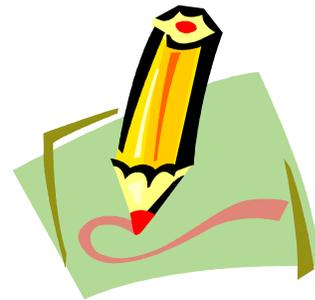
- knows material
- relates content to other material, to course, to other contexts
- responds to what assignment asks for
- shows understanding, not only restatement of material
- provides examples, explanations, evidence, back up, descriptions

### **Organization/Structure**

- introduction/preface outlining the purpose of the paper and how the paper will unfold
- logical sequencing of ideas
- connections between/support of ideas
- maintains focus
- concept development
- conclusion
- all components of assignment are present

### **Style**

- clarity
- able to paraphrase and summarize
- interweaves own ideas/opinions with other sources
- variety/dynamics in expression
- economy of expression
- vocabulary
- flow
- tone



### **Format**

- |                                  |                 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| • message structures (sentences) | • appearance    |
| • spelling                       | • documentation |
| • grammar                        | • references    |
| • usage                          | • punctuation   |
| • headings                       | • margin        |
| • title page                     |                 |

## **Grade Assignment**

**A+ (90-100%)** Exceptional analysis; thoughtful integration; creative synthesis; relevance and application across contexts; depth of insight; clarity, flow and connectedness throughout; careful attention to stylistic and formal details; coherence and unity are strong.

**A (80-89%)** Very good analysis; well developed integration and synthesis of ideas; evidence of ability to apply concepts beyond a single context; insight evident; clarity, flow and connectedness present; stylistic and format details present, but less refined; coherence and unity evident.

**B (70-79%)** Solid knowledge of content; shows integration and synthesis of theory and opinion; less refined application beyond single context; shows clarity of thought and logical organization of ideas; maintains focus; less refined stylistic and format details; gaps in coherence and unity.

**C (60-69%)** Incomplete understanding/knowledge of content; inconsistencies in integration and synthesis; unrefined, vague, or absent application of concepts; rambling but leading to a point; inconsistent focus, sequencing, and/or connections; lack of attention to style and format; large gaps in coherence and unity.

**D (50-59%)** Lack of understanding/knowledge of content; unclear, rambling, does not make a point; lack of integration and/or synthesis; lack of focus and/or concept development; little or no attention to style and format; lacking in coherence and unity.

**Breakdown of Evaluation According to Year**

	Content	Organization/Structure	Style	Format
First/Second	50%	30%	10%	10%
Third	40%	30%	15%	15%
Fourth	40%	30%	20%	10%

## Coding for Evaluations in Seminars

The theory behind this evaluative tool is to record your impressions of the interactions in seminar by using a special coding system. Depending on the quality of the comment, students will get a specific code and that code will reflect a mark which can be averaged (maybe in conjunction with number of times a comment was made) so give the fairest discussion mark possible. If you use this system, remember to consistently employ it, every seminar, throughout the course.

### a) During Discussion

Code	Grade	Description
+	85-100%	Thoughtful; deep conceptual understanding and application; articulate
=	70-84%	Knows content; is clear and organized
~	60-69%	Incomplete understanding or knowledge of content; rambling but leading to a point
o	50-60%	Lack of understanding/knowledge of content; unclear, rambling no point made
x	50(-)%	Talked for the sake of talking; no connection to content; incoherent or inappropriate comments

### b) During Observation/Listening

Code all students periodically throughout the seminar. Make sure you watch for student's reactions, gestures and involvement through non-verbal communication. This way, shy students who contribute in non-verbal ways will receive a half-decent participation mark.

Code	Grade	Description
+	85-100%	Sensitive to others' expressions and gestures; responsible and responsive conduct; thoughtful and articulate responses to others comments
=	70-84%	Aware of others; able to respond to others' comments
~	60-69%	Inconsistent awareness of others; inconsistent attention to others' comments
o	50-59%	More unaware than aware of others; weak or inaccurate responses to others' comments
x	50(-)%	Lack of involvement; reluctant to assume speaker role; no response to others' comments.

*I am not a teacher—only a fellow traveler of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead—ahead of myself as well as behind. ---George Bernard Shaw*