

# Alternative Grading

## Shared philosophy among alternative grading schemes

- Grades should reflect students' learning, not their compliance or behavior.
- Grades should reflect what students can eventually show they have learned.
- Students should have multiple opportunities and methods to demonstrate their learning.
- Grades and points are nonexistent or de-emphasized in favor of rich, deep feedback.

## Philosophical distinctions among common alternative grading schemes

<b>Standards-Based Grading</b>	Grades should reflect students' proficiency in clearly defined learning objectives.
<b>Specifications Grading</b>	Grades should reflect students' completion of work to clearly specified levels.
<b>Ungrading</b>	Grades should be minimized or nonexistent, and should be determined collaboratively by students & instructors when they must exist.

## Standards-Based Grading

- Students are provided with a clear list of learning objectives (or “standards”).
- Assignments are marked based on students' demonstrated levels of proficiency on each of the relevant standards.
- Course grades are primarily based on how many of these standards students demonstrate their learning on over the course of the semester.
- Students are given many chances to demonstrate their learning.

## Specifications Grading

- Each assignment is accompanied with a clear list of “specifications” of what constitutes acceptable work.
- Assignments are marked based on whether students have met each of the specifications for that assignment.
- Course grades are based on completing bundles of assignments to specified levels.
- Students are typically given chances to revise their work to demonstrate their learning.

## Ungrading

- Assignments are typically not marked with a grade or other evaluation; instead, the focus is on providing feedback.
- Students are typically asked to reflect on their learning many times throughout the semester.
- Course grades are determined collaboratively by students and instructors, often through one-on-one meetings.

## Resources

The Grading Conference, June 13–15, 2024 (virtual). <https://www.thegradingconference.com/>.  
Alternative Grading Slack Channel <http://alternativegrading.slack.com>.

### Standards-Based Grading

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### Specifications Grading

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- Clossey, Luke & Souman, Esther (2021). Evaluating Without Grading. Perspectives on History 59(7). <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2021/evaluating-without-grading-encouraging-students-to-master-skills-with-specifications-grading>.
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- Nilson, Linda (2015). *Specifications grading: Restoring rigor, motivating students, and saving faculty time*. Stylus Publishing, LLC. <https://styluspub.presswarehouse.com/browse/book/9781620362426/Specifications-Grading>.
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### Ungrading

- Bagley, Spencer (2020). Ungrading as Resistance. Talk Math With Your Friends. <https://youtu.be/BeTRp73gtp4>.
- Blum, Susan (ed.) (2020). *Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning (and what to do instead)*. West Virginia University Press. <https://wvupressonline.com/ungrading>
- Jarvis, Claire (2021). Chemistry educators try 'ungrading' techniques to help students learn. Chemical & Engineering News, 98(16). <https://cen.acs.org/education/undergraduate-education/Chemistry-educators-try-ungradingtechniques-help/98/i16>.
- Sorensen-Unruh, Clarissa (2019). Ungrading: A Series <https://clarissasorensenunruh.com/2019/02/10/ungrading-a-series-part-1/>.
- Stommel, Jesse (2018). How to Ungrade. <https://www.jessestommel.com/how-to-ungrade/>.
- Stommel, Jesse (2023). *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop*. Hybrid Pedagogy Inc.