



GRADING RUBRIC AND EXPLANATION For All of My Courses

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Overview of My Grading Criteria

This document describes my approach to grading various course assessments (such as essays and online discussions, class activities, etc.). It highlights the common tasks involved in answering these questions and provides an explanation for the grading system used. It is important that students carefully read this grading rubric in order to successfully pass the course.

Purpose of Activities and Questions

The grading system described in this document is appropriate for all the different types of questions, problems, and activities that I use in my classes. Specifically, this document will explicate a common grading system for the following types of assessment tasks: 1) essay and written discussion questions, 2) in-class and out-of-class activities, and 3) problem-based questions (such as those used in Statistics).

Generally speaking, course questions, activities, and problems are written to highlight a main concept. They are designed to cover a moderate amount of material at a reasonably deep level of understanding. Specifically, questions that ask students to generate examples, integrate ideas, compare/contrast research findings, or apply a concept to a unique situation always tap a deeper level of understanding than those that simply ask students to repeat back definitions, lists, examples, or answers to highly similar questions.

Assessing Levels of Performance on Criteria

Regardless of what task you are asked to do (such as explain a theory, work a statistics problem, or provide an example), the same three basic, inter-related indicators of quality are applicable:

- “Appropriateness” – The extent to which the ideas or method are relevant to the question
- “Correctness” – The extent to which the statements or work is correct and accurate
- “Completeness” – The extent to which a complete or thorough answer is given

Put simply, a good answer clearly communicates a clear, insightful, and elegant answer to the question at hand. A concise, but thorough, statement is always the ticket to a good grade; an unnecessarily lengthy answer gives the reader the impression that you are not organized and that you do not fully grasp the topic. Similarly, instructors can only judge the quality of an answer by what is explicitly written, not by what the student “had in mind” when writing the answer.

In general, your level of performance in achieving these indicators of quality can be judged on the following general rubric. For each task involved in an answer, performance on that task will be rated as being one of the following:

- Unacceptable – Performance does not meet the quality expectations for the task
- Problematic – Performance meets low quality expectations for the task
- Satisfactory – Performance meets normal quality expectations for the task
- Exceptional – Performance meets high quality expectations for the task

The Criteria as Applied to Specific Tasks

This section is designed to integrate the ideas above while tying them to the different tasks typically involved in an activity, problem, or question. Different types of courses and assessments will have different goals and purposes.

Explaining Main Theories and Concepts

In most cases I am interested in your ability to identify and explain key concepts and theories. This is the traditional core aspect of many questions. Can you explain the relevant concepts at the appropriate depth in your answer?

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Rubric Category	Unacceptable (0 points)	Problematic (1 point)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Exceptional (3 points)
Theories & Concepts (0-3 Points)	Answer is irrelevant, incorrect, or missing for the question.	Answer is unreasonable with major flaws, such as barely relevant, misused, or vague concepts.	Answer is reasonable but with minor flaws, such as only broadly relevant, slightly incorrect, or only paraphrased concepts.	Answer is clearly relevant, with accurate and thorough explicitly-defined concepts.

Providing Evidence for Theories and Concepts

Similarly, as a science, psychology demands that we support our statements with research examples and findings. Research examples are data-based summaries of main concepts derived from the textbook, course readings, or class discussions. Can you provide strong research-based justification for the main concepts?

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Rubric Category	Unacceptable (0 points)	Problematic (1 point)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Exceptional (3 points)
Research Evidence (0-3 Points)	Evidence is irrelevant, incorrect, or missing for the question.	Evidence is unreasonable with major flaws, such as barely relevant, misused, or vague examples.	Evidence is reasonable but with minor flaws, such as only broadly relevant, slightly incorrect, or only paraphrased examples.	Evidence is clearly relevant, with accurate and thorough explicitly-described examples.

Applications of Theories and Concepts

Definitions of concepts by themselves do not clarify meaning; good examples are always more capable of clarifying the exact meaning or importance of a concept. Can you explain how and why a main concept is important in a practical or everyday situation?

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Rubric Category	Unacceptable (0 points)	Problematic (1 point)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Exceptional (3 points)
Everyday Applications (0-3 Points)	Example is irrelevant, incorrect, or missing for the question.	Example is unreasonable with major flaws, such as barely relevant, misused, or vague examples.	Example is reasonable but with minor flaws, such as only broadly relevant, slightly incorrect, or only paraphrased examples.	Example is clearly relevant, with accurate and thorough explicitly-described examples.

Implementing Formulas and Procedures

Applying the key concepts is also the core aspect of most problem-based questions in mathematics and statistics, but now in terms of your ability to use the proper procedures and to apply the proper formulas. Can you implement the relevant procedures and formulae to provide a correct answer?

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Rubric Category	Unacceptable (0 points)	Problematic (1 point)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Exceptional (3 points)
Procedures & Formulae (0-3 Points)	Procedure is irrelevant, incorrect, or missing for the question.	Procedure is unreasonable with major flaws, such as barely relevant, misused, or vague formulas.	Procedure is reasonable but with minor flaws, such as only broadly relevant, slightly incorrect, or only paraphrased formulas.	Procedure is clearly relevant, with accurate and thorough explicitly-described formulas.

Writing Style and Integrating Material

Submitted work should more than a bulleted list or disorganized jumble of statements and claims. For example, an essay should concisely integrate the concepts and examples to answer the question at hand. Can you organize your argument and justifications into a coherent and elegant written piece of work?

Similarly, even problem-based questions in mathematics and statistics require interpretation. Can you organize your numerical answers in a written manner that communicates and integrates what has been learned while solving the problem?

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations
Rubric Category	Unacceptable (0 points)	Acceptable (1 point)
Writing Style & Integration (0-1 Points)	Writing is improper for the question, has several spelling or grammatical errors, or has unclear or haphazard organization.	Writing style is proper for the question, has few spelling and grammatical errors, and has a focused and integrated organization.

Adapting the Criteria to Specific Course Assessments

Of course, these criteria and principles may be adapted to a wide variety of tasks and course assessments. Many course assessments – exams, paper, projects, etc. – are relatively complex tasks that contain many components. In these cases, each of the components would be assessed using a version of tasks and rubric categories above. The appropriate combined rubric for the course assessment will simply stack the separate categories to create a final rubric and the point total will be determined similarly.

Specific Criteria for 4-Point Activities

Activity-based questions are relatively simple tasks that are generally appropriate for activities. Their purpose is to provide you with an opportunity to practice identifying appropriate examples of a concept. Specifically, I am interested in your ability to describe an appropriate, thoughtful, and sufficient example for the question at hand. In some cases, this involves describing an everyday application of a set of concepts; in others, this activity may involve describing research evidence of a concept. Because activity-based problems typically exist on pre-organized worksheets, formal writing style has less weight; however, some level of proper writing (i.e., sentence and paragraph structure, etc.) would be necessary for clarity.

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Exceptional
Everyday Applications (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking Details	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Details Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough Details
Writing Style & Integration (0-1 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper Format for Question <input type="checkbox"/> Several Grammatical/Spelling Errors <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear or Haphazard Organization		<input type="checkbox"/> Proper Format for Question Few Grammatical/Spelling Errors Focused and Integrated Organization	

Specific Criteria for 4-Point Essays

Short essays are generally appropriate for homework assignments and certain exams. Here the purpose is to assess your ability to implement or use a specific concept. One example of the 4-point question is the short traditional essay, where I am specifically interested in your ability to reasonably articulate only the conceptual aspects of the question. Because it is an essay question, it will be expected to have a proper written form (i.e., sentence and paragraph structure, APA style, etc.).

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Exceptional
Theories & Concepts (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking Details	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Details Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough Details
Writing Style & Integration (0-1 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper Format for Question <input type="checkbox"/> Several Grammatical/Spelling Errors <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear or Haphazard Organization		<input type="checkbox"/> Proper Format for Question Few Grammatical/Spelling Errors Focused and Integrated Organization	

Specific Criteria for 4-Point Statistics Problems

Another version of the 4-point rubric is used for a typical story-based problem in Statistics, where I am specifically interested in your ability reasonably implement the relevant concept and formulae to communicate a correct answer. Here the calculation of a proper solution is analogous to properly describing a concept; the solution needs to be appropriate, accurate, and complete. And because I always ask for a short written interpretation of the solution, there is an expected of proper written form as well (i.e., sentence structure, APA style for Results, etc.).

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectations	
Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Exceptional
Procedures & Formulae (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking Details	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Details Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough Details
Writing Style & Integration (0-1 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper Format for Question <input type="checkbox"/> Several Grammatical/Spelling Errors <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear or Haphazard Organization		<input type="checkbox"/> Proper Format for Question Few Grammatical/Spelling Errors Focused and Integrated Organization	