

Ungrading and re-centering process in the classroom

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Grades are anathema to the presumption of the humanity of students, support for their basic needs, and engaging them as full participants in their own education. Invigilated exams won't ensure integrity. Plagiarism detection tech won't unseat online paper mills. Incessant surveillance won't help us listen better for the voices of students asking for help. All of our efforts would be better served by three simple words, "I trust you."

- Jesse Stommel, *Grades are Dehumanizing; Ungrading is No Simple Solution* (2021)

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.

Our science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract, and castrate meaning, forgetting that life is full of noise and that death alone is silent: work noise, noise of man, and noise of beast. Noise bought, sold, or prohibited. Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise.

Today, our sight has dimmed; it no longer sees our future, having constructed a present made of abstraction, nonsense, and silence. Now we must learn to judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festivals, than by its statistics. By listening to noise, we can better understand where the folly of men and their calculations is leading us, and what hopes it is still possible to have.

- Jacques Attali, *Noise: the Political Economy of Music* (1977)

Why do we grade?

What do we not want
to lose about grades?

What is scary about
abandoning them?



How does the CTL approach this issue?

Assessments

Summative Assessment

- Assessment *of* learning
- Always graded

Formative Assessment:

- Assessment *for* learning
- Can be graded or ungraded, often written reflection
- classroom assessment techniques; assessment wrappers

Classroom Assessment Techniques

- Misconception / prior knowledge check
- Muddiest point
- Minute paper / one thing you learned

Assessment Wrappers

- Written reflections on summative assessment
- Briefing and debriefing

CTL Approach

- Teaching is best done by integrating formative assessments into the classroom
- *Re-centering process* defined by
 - Teachers adapting curriculum and materials to student feedback
 - Students reflecting on their own methods and questions
- Summative assessment still the focal point of the classroom

The ungrading stance

- Grades are not good incentive
- Grades are not good feedback
- Grades encourage competitiveness over collaboration
- Grades encourage fixed mindsets over growth mindsets
- Grades discourage metacognition
- Grades are not good markers of learning
- Grades don't reflect the subjective, emotional character of learning
- Grades are not “fair”

The ungrading stance

ungrading is the *process* of questioning our reliance on grades

The ungrading stance

ungrading is the *process* of questioning our reliance on grades

ungrading is the *process* of having to provide grades while believing that assessment can never be standardized

Rubrics

CTL:

“Rubrics allow instructors to clarify what they are looking for in student work and make these expectations explicit to students. When well-designed and implemented, rubrics allow instructors to give consistent and clear feedback on activities, assignments, exams, projects, participation, etc., and to save time in the grading process.” [1]

Alfie Kohn:

“These doubts [in alternative assessment] were stoked not only by murmurs of dissent I heard from thoughtful educators but by the case made for this technique by its enthusiastic proponents. For example, I read in one article that “rubrics make assessing student work quick and efficient, and they help teachers to justify to parents and others the grades that they assign to students.” To which the only appropriate response is: Uh-oh.” [2]

1. <https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/incorporating-rubrics/>
2. <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/trouble-rubrics/>

CRITICAL THINKING VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact valuel@aacu.org



Definition

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (full one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3 2		Benchmark 1
Explanation of issues	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/ or backgrounds unknown.	Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.
Evidence <i>Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion</i>	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/ evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/ evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/ evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/ evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.
Influence of context and assumptions	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.
Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.
Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)	Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order.	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.

Single-Scale Rubrics

Points to work on	Content	Strengths
	Material is presented in a sensible order and manner, with a narrative structure	
	Clear, clean graphics and visual presentation of material	
	Clear verbal communication of most relevant points	

Grading Contracts

Grading contracts

Unilateral Contract (Peter Elbow & Jane Danielewicz)

- Students guaranteed a B if every participation requirement is met, writing is only graded for students who meet those requirements

Teacher Proposal Contract (Ira Shor)

- Participation contract is fully negotiated with individual students, everyone's work is graded

Labor Contracts (Asao Inoue)

- Value is only measured in terms of labor

Unilateral Contract

So we don't get rid of grading entirely, but our contract radically reduces it. Throughout the semester we use only three possible grades: not satisfactory for B, satisfactory for B, and better than B. We don't distinguish among grades higher than B till [sic] the end of the semester, when we have student portfolios in hand.

- Peter Elbow & Jane Danielewicz

1. attend class regularly—not missing more than a week's worth of classes;
2. meet due dates and writing criteria for all major assignments;
3. participate in all in-class exercises and activities;
4. complete all informal, low stakes writing assignments (e.g. journal writing or discussion-board writing);
5. give thoughtful peer feedback during class workshops and work faithfully with your group on other collaborative tasks (e.g., sharing papers, commenting on drafts, peer editing, on-line discussion boards, answering peer questions);
6. sustain effort and investment on each draft of all papers;
7. make substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up;
8. copy-edit all final revisions of main assignments until they conform to the conventions of edited, revised English;
9. attend conferences with the teacher to discuss drafts;
10. submit your mid term and final portfolio.

Thus you earn the grade of B entirely on the basis of what you do—on your conscientious effort and participation. The grade of B does not derive from my judgment about the quality of your writing. Grades higher than B, however, do rest on my judgment of writing quality. To earn higher grades you must produce writing—particularly for your final portfolio—that I judge to be exceptionally high quality.

Teacher Proposal Contract

A “contract” requires “a meeting of the minds,” that is, a covenant of explicit understandings between all parties affected by the terms... No contract exists if one party unilaterally obliges another to abide by terms to which the second party did not formally consent.

- Ira Shor

In the end, there is a kind of mirror contrast between their contract and ours. With their goal of inviting students to take more control over their lives, Shor et al give up as much power over course requirements and student behavior as they can manage, but they keep full power to grade writing. With our goal of reducing the effect of grading, we give up as much power over grading as we can manage, but we keep full power to determine course requirements and student behavior.

- Peter Elbow & Jane Danielewicz

Labor Contract

[Other] contracts' basic premise is clear: your assessment ecology will keep the most exemplary grades away from some students, regardless of their desires for those grades or the amount of work they are willing to put into their writing in order to get those grades. More often than not, these students will be students of color, working-class, and multilingual students—students with habitus other than the dominant White racial habitus embodied in the teacher, rubric, standards, and course outcomes.

- Asao Inoue

“A” or Higher Grades

The grade of B (3.1) depends primarily on *behavior* and *labor*. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked? Higher grades than the default, the **grades of 3.4, 3.7, or 4.0**, however, require *more labor that helps or supports the class* in its mutual discussions and examinations of language. In order to raise your grade, you may complete as many of the following items of labor as you like (doing three gets you a 4.0). Each item completed fully and in the appropriate manner will raise your final course grade by .3.

- A **substantive revision of two (2) mini-projects** that meaningfully takes into account all feedback and conversation had over both previous mini-projects (described in labor #6 on the syllabus).
- A **20-30 minute, individual class presentation**, with a lesson outline, handout for the class, and a post-activity reflection letter (addressed to Asao), on the material we've agreed upon (described in labor #8 on the syllabus). These presentations may be on chapters from Lippi-Green's text that are not officially assigned.

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Yael Niv's Contract

- Nothing is graded during the course
- Assignment contract is unilateral
 - Items in **red** are required, the rest are optional but come out of the final grade
- Performance partially determined by individual goals
 - Personally-relevant skills / growth

Course components: the course has 5 components, each geared toward different skills you can learn

- 1) **Class participation = 20%**
- 2) 3 problem sets, 3 reading prompts = 30%
- 3) 3 Group presentations = 15%
- 4) **Group work on projects = 20%**
- 5) **Final paper = 15%**

Required; “optional”



Ungrading as a TA