

Assignments and Grading

Assignments Overview

- Class Preparation: written questions or observations about course readings or drafts of writing in progress
- A Domain of Your Own: carve out your own corner of the net
- Blogging: dig into course topics and ideas each week beyond what we cover in class discussions
- Required Writing Assignments
 - No Digital Day: conduct a personal experiment in pre-internet living and write a reflection about the experience
 - We’re All Wikipedians Now: create or substantially improve a Wikipedia article
 - Dear (My) Data: record personal data, imagine a novel way to visualize it, and write about what the process reveals
- Optional Writing Assignments
 - Essay: write a “traditional” college essay on a topic of your choice (1)
 - Unessay: make an academic argument through the analytical or creative medium of your choice. (1 or 2)
 - Interactive Twine essay: write branching web-based argument using software such as Twine (1)

Grade Contracts

In this course, you will determine the grade you receive by fulfilling a contract you will submit for my approval on the third day of class: **Monday, September 10**. Your written contract will detail:

1. the requirements you will meet in order to receive the grade for which you’ve contracted,
2. the penalties you will incur for not meeting those requirements,
3. a calendar you will follow for meeting the requirements you have outlined. Many aspects of this calendar will be determined by windows outlined on the course schedule, but your contract will take ownership of these

deadlines while committing to specific due dates for the course's more flexible assignments.

Why Contract Grading?

As you no doubt know, grading can be a contentious issue in college courses, particularly in writing- and discussion-based courses, where grades can seem arbitrary and contestable. Grading in school does not much resemble the way you will be evaluated in your lives or careers, where you will define many of your own goals and be measured by how responsibly and effectively you achieve them. To quote Cathy Davidson, a professor at CUNY from whom most of my ideas about contract grading are adapted:

The advantage of contract grading is that you, the student, decide how much work you wish to do this semester; if you complete that work on time and satisfactorily, you will receive the grade for which you contracted. This means planning ahead, thinking about all of your obligations and responsibilities this semester and also determining what grade you want or need in this course. The advantage of contract grading to the professor is no whining, no special pleading, on the students part. If you complete the work you contracted for, you get the grade. Done. I respect the student who only needs a C, who has other obligations that preclude doing all of the requirements to earn an A in the course, and who contracts for the C and carries out the contract perfectly. (This is another one of those major life skills: taking responsibility for your own workflow.)

Contract Details

To fulfill **any** grade contract a student must do the following, which should nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval:

1. Come to class prepared to discuss any assigned readings, games, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Complete interim self-assessments when requested during the semester demonstrating that you are on-track to meet the requirements agreed to in your grade contract.
3. Complete the 3 required writing assignments and revise all 3 until you and your instructor agree they are "Satisfactory."
4. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements, submitting it to Professor Cordell by 5pm on Tuesday, December 11.

“A” Contract

To contract for an “A” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation assignments (reading responses and writing-in-progress drafts) save two, meaning you could miss up to two classes, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to two class preparation submissions, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than one information overload day during the semester.
3. Exceed expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Create a website following option 1 or 2 in the “A Domain of Your Own” assignment (and ideally option 1).
5. Write at least 8 “Satisfactory” blog entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the blogging assignment, you may not complete two blog posts for credit in the same week, and you cannot make up missed blog entries at the end of the semester.
6. Complete at least 2 optional writing assignments and revise at least 1 of these until you and your instructor agree it is “Satisfactory.”

“B” Contract

To contract for an “B” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation assignments (reading responses and writing-in-progress drafts) save three, meaning you could miss up to three classes, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to three class preparation submissions, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than two information overload days during the semester.
3. Fully meet expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Create a website following option 1 or 2 in the “A Domain of Your Own” assignment.
5. Write at least 7 “Satisfactory” weekly blog entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the blogging assignment, you may not complete two blog posts for credit in the same week, and you cannot make up missed blog entries at the end of the semester.
6. Complete at least 1 optional writing assignment and revise it until you and your instructor agree it is “Satisfactory.”

“C” Contract

To contract for an “C” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation assignments (reading responses and writing-in-progress drafts) save four, meaning you could miss up

to four classes, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to four class preparation submissions, or some combination of these conditions.

2. Take no more than three information overload days during the semester.
3. Generally meet expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Create a website following option 1, 2, or 3 in the “A Domain of Your Own” assignment.
5. Write at least 6 “Satisfactory” weekly blog entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the blogging assignment, you may not complete two blog posts for credit in the same week, and you cannot make up missed blog entries at the end of the semester.
6. Complete at least 1 optional writing assignment.

“D” and “F” Grades

I’ve borrowed this clause, too, from Cathy Davidson, because I cannot improve upon it:

The professor reserves the right to award a grade of D or F to anyone who fails to meet a contractual obligation in a systematic way. A “D” grade denotes some minimal fulfilling of the contract. An “F” is absence of enough satisfactory work, as contracted, to warrant passing of the course. Both a “D” and “F” denote a breakdown of the contractual relationship implied by signing any of the contracts described above.

What About Exceptional (or Mediocre) Work?

I also reserve the right to reward exceptional work throughout the semester using the full range of Northeastern’s grading scale. If you contract for a “B,” for instance, and submit particularly strong pieces to fulfill that contract, I may elect to raise your contracted grade to a “B+.”

Likewise, if you consistently submit mediocre work in fulfillment of your contract, I reserve the right to adjust your grade one half-step down (e.g. from “A” to “A-”).

Contract Adjustments

Periodically during the semester I will ask you to evaluate your work thus far and compare it against what you agreed in your grade contract. In these moments you can also take the opportunity to request an adjustment to your contract in either direction. If you find that you will be unable to meet the obligations

of your contract, you may request to move to the next lowest grade and its requirements. Contrariwise, if you find that you've been performing above the obligations of your contract, you may request to fulfill the requirements for the next higher grade. **Important Note:** In order to effectively evaluate your own progress, you must keep track of your work, including days missed, IO days taken, blogs completed, and so forth.