

Instructor Goals versus Student Incentives in Traditionally Graded and Mastery Graded Courses

I want students to practice/study regularly

I will wait to study. The midterm isn't for another month!

I need to keep up with the material since we have assessments every week.

... to review their work and the solutions

There's no point to reviewing old material since it won't be on future tests.

If I review that topic, I can try again next time.

... to feel comfortable making and learning from mistakes

I need to get things right the first time they're assessed, otherwise I'm a failure.

It's okay if I don't get it the first time. I can review the material and try again without risking a lower grade.

... to know we care mostly about their understanding and communication

I don't need to master any of the material since I can pass the class by accumulating partial credit.

I need to really understand this topic in order to receive credit for my work.

... to feel confident that their grade represents their learning

Final grades are curved, so I should focus on doing just enough to be better than my peers.

My grade is based on the number of skills I master during the semester.

... to not waste time agonizing over a couple points on assessments

If I can convince the Professor to give me a couple more points for my answer, it will help my final grade.

There is no partial credit, so I will try again on the next assessment.

... to feel like their grade is a fair reflection of their achievement

If I get sick on the day of the midterm or final, my grade will be ruined.

It's okay if I miss or do poorly on an individual assessment, so long as I am still on track to master the material.

... to understand that their grade tracks their performance over the semester

It feels like I am losing points during the semester with every exam and assignment.

With every skill I master I gain points towards my final grade.