Recording Results Effectively

Grading Supplement

I. Planning Your Approach
II. Tabulating Grades
III. Reporting Results to Maximize Motivation

Introduction

Your grading system represents the final stage of feedback—the official reporting of student progress to students, families, and the school administration. In addition to communicating a child's level of proficiency, grades serve as the basis for a myriad of decisions affecting children's lives, including grade-level promotion, placement in remedial or advanced classes, college admissions, scholarships, and prizes. Therefore, it is your professional obligation to collect enough data on student performance to determine a fair and accurate summative evaluation of each student's performance.

One key purpose of an effective grading system is to measure how well your students have mastered learning goals. This means developing scales that help you distinguish between varied levels of student performance—and between tasks of varied importance and weight to allow all of your grades to come together into a composite reflection of student achievement. You should map out in advance all the formal assessments you plan to utilize during a grading period to ensure that you will have enough data regarding all objectives when determining a grade. Ensuring that academic grades reflect student learning also means deciding how to separate academic performance from non-academic performance, even though you may be tempted to use the threat of lowered grades to discourage certain student behavior.

You should also be conscious that feedback and grades can have motivating or debilitating effects on students, and your policies should be designed to take the mystery out of assessment and help students see that hard work does lead to improvement. That, along with ensuring that grades accurately portray a child's progress to you, students, parents and decision-makers, will lead to an effective system. Here are some concrete suggestions to get you on your way:

I. Planning Your Approach

a. Identify pertinent grading policies and schedules. Before creating your own evaluation system, be sure to examine any school or district-wide grading policies that you will need to abide by (e.g., the grading scale utilized by the school system or the report card format). Schools and districts may have strict policies regarding report card or end-of-term grading, but you will probably have greater latitude in your use of grades at other times of the year. You should also be familiar with the grading calendar. Be aware of when grades or progress reports are due, so you can schedule all applicable summative assessments before that time.

b. Avoid the "curve." When you do have the liberty to design your measurement systems, grading should always be done in reference to learning criteria, never on the curve. Grading on the curve pits students against one another and converts learning into a game of winners and losers—with most students falling into the latter category. On the other hand, grading in reference to learning criteria sends the message to students that the goal is to learn the material and to fulfill their own potential.

c. Ensure that your grading systems account for differences in performance. In general, your grading scales should be refined enough to make detailed distinctions between the quality of work that students submit. A system that measures Karina's performance at 79 and Macedonio's performance at 72, for instance, is more effective than one that gives both students a C. Grading systems, however, should provide more than just a simple score representing the overall performance of students. Effective grading should also produce an accurate report of how students are achieving on individual learning goals or objectives. This detailed information provides a more nuanced picture of the differences between student performances and is vital for making informed instructional decisions that target student needs. Having this level of detail in your grading systems also allows you to communicate to students exactly where they are strong and where they need to improve.

In the chapter on Assessment, you saw how teachers develop rubrics, anchor papers, and other tools to help evaluate projects, term papers and other assignments that may rely on a more subjective means of judgment. You also saw how teachers develop a sliding scale of evaluation for individual test questions since open-ended tasks are bound to yield responses of different quality. Remember that the best teachers are able to clearly articulate what different levels of student work will look like as they create their grading tools. Thus, instead of grading as you go along, you should always design a standard method of evaluating work *before* you administer any assignment that you will grade.

Weighting Questions
Consider a test for students expected to compare the American and French Revolutions. You may have three sections, each weighted to represent their relative importance and difficulty.

- Fill-in-the blank questions that require students to recall terms, names and dates: 25 percent (10 questions, 2.5 points each).
- Short-answer questions that require students to explain various events: 30 percent (6 questions, 5 points each).
- An essay question that requires students to compare the relative success of the two revolutions: 45 percent (1 question, graded on a 5-tier rubric).

d. Ensure that your grading systems provide consistency. Receiving an 85 should represent the same quality of work on every assessment throughout the semester. This especially becomes a concern when teachers incorporate rubrics into their grading system, and a three on a four-point scale suddenly becomes a 75 percent. Remember that your grading system should tell you the extent to which students are mastering objectives, so if a three on a rubric represents correct punctuation 85 percent of the time, make sure you make the applicable conversions. Otherwise, you will skew your averages.

e. Ensure that your grading systems take into account the relative weight and importance of different assignments. Simply adding up the number of correct answers on a test and dividing by the number of total questions to calculate a percentage does not usually yield an accurate score. Nor does simply averaging a student's scores from all of the assignments of the marking period yield a reliable composite grade. You will use a variety of assessment tools (journal entries, tests, projects, class participation) as evidence of your students' mastery of your curriculum. Each question or assessment should be given a weight corresponding to:

- The portion of learning goals covered by the question or assessment
- The material's relative importance
- The time you spent teaching that concept (ideally, similar to the importance)
- The number of parts or sections in the task (a question that asks students to perform three actions should be worth more than a multiple choice question)
- The relative difficulty of the task (higher difficulty merits higher points)

On a test, that means that certain questions and sections will be worth more than others (see table, *right*). Over the course of a marking period, certain assignments will carry more weight, based on the same criteria. It is common practice to calculate grades on a "total points" model, where each assignment is worth a certain number of points out of the total number available during that marking period. A test worth 40 percent of the marking period's grade could be worth 80 points, an essay worth 20 percent could be worth 40 points. This only underscores the importance of planning assessments ahead of time; only then will you know how to assign relative weights to various tasks because you will be considering each assignment in relation to the others.

While every teacher approaches his or her tabulations differently, effective teachers have a rationale behind their weighting systems. Michele Cadwallader, Delta '97, teaches French and weighs daily work 25 percent; tests, quizzes, major projects and performances 50 percent; and participation 25 percent. "I believe a teacher should thoughtfully consider these percentages," she says. "This system accurately reflects what I esteem as most important in a foreign language classroom. Tests and quizzes are high because unless I know that students know the vocabulary, I cannot move on. Everything builds on what has previously been learned. Participation is also quite high because approximately 40 percent of my state standards refer to oral and aural work." Given that there is no across-the-board consensus on what these percentages should be, and because these decisions are largely dependent on your subject matter, we've included a number of other sample grading systems in the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (pp. 100-107) so you can see how different corps members approach this task; this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. 🛠

II. Tabulating Grades

a. Grade accurately and consistently. While it is vital to plan your approach to grading, this is only the first step. The best of plans will not lead to success if you do not appropriately implement or execute them. Thus, it is imperative that you grade carefully and accurately. Make sure that you are following your plans to evaluate student performance in a fair and thorough manner. Otherwise, you will get unreliable data that won't help you to move students forward. Also, remember to grade consistently enough so that you can track and communicate student progress on a frequent basis. If you don't grade the assessments you administer, you won't be able to understand your students' successes and struggles to make informed adjustments to your instructional plans.

b. You can select which assignments to grade. A common question from beginning teachers is, "Do I have to grade everything?" If you have asked your students to complete a task, you should examine their work as a gauge of their progress and provide feedback. Yet determining an exact grade on every single assignment is probably not a good use of your time. For certain tasks, some teachers will simply make notations in their records of who seems to need more practice on specific goals and who demonstrates particularly strong effort (giving a check-plus versus a check on homework, for example). In some classrooms, the teacher reviews the homework aloud with the class, and students self-monitor their progress and ask questions on points they do not understand. Here, completing the homework and understanding the correct answers become prerequisites for success on subsequent assignments that are graded formally.

c. Separate non-academic performance from your tabulations. As different educators share their grading systems with you, you will notice that some teachers deduct points from a child's grade because of tardiness, late assignments, or misbehavior, despite the fact that the student demonstrates academic performance far above the resulting average. These teachers wish to teach their students the responsibility of completing assigned tasks on time, being neat and organized, and following classroom

rules. They reason that it would be unfair to give a student who completes work promptly the same grade as someone who does not. This is an understandable rationale.

Remember, though, that altering grades in this way makes them less useful tools for others to know how well a child has performed on the objectives you've taught. It will be impossible for anyone outside your classroom to know the reasons and meanings behind a single number or letter – a major problem because grades are used to make important decisions about placement and promotion. It is more appropriate and effective to address the issues of why students do not behave properly or turn in assignments in the first place, rather than assign grades that are inaccurate measurements of a student's skills. Some schools are now moving toward a dual reporting system in which one grade reflects a student's mastery of academic material and another reflects personal responsibility and effort. Use this or some other notification system (written quarterly reports or parent conferences, for example) to indicate attitudinal problems or successes, meanwhile leaving the academic grade unadulterated and reflective of a child's level of academic mastery and progress.

d. Consider students with special needs. For students with special needs, the decision of how to balance effort with achievement becomes particularly complicated. A student's special needs may require him or her to work a great deal harder to attain only modest gains in performance. If this effort is not recognized, the student may become frustrated and lose sight of the importance of working hard. One strategy is to use a scale of "not working, working, making progress, mastery," which places the focus on effort, but also indicates whether the performance objective has been met.

e. Consider margin of error when evaluating borderline cases for students about to fail your class. Because of the limited number of questions on any test, the subjectivity of certain grading practices and the "bad day" factor (a student might have had a fight with a peer right before taking a crucial test), you should acknowledge the margin of error in any assessment. For a borderline case of a student on the cusp of failing and passing your class, you should seek out additional proof that the child has not mastered objectives before failing him or her.

Instead of giving a student a "deadly zero" for a missed assignment (potentially knocking their average down nearly 20 points), some teachers will hound the child until he or she hands it in, enlisting parents if necessary; it may come to light that the child was capable of completing a project but did not understand the expectations. Ultimately, it is acceptable to fail students if they have demonstrated that they have not adequately mastered the material. (The lowest grade some teachers and schools will give is a 50, to avoid complete decimation of someone's average.) It is not constructive to allow the mathematics of averages and zeros to fail a student who has demonstrated his or her proficiency in other ways.

III. Reporting Results to Maximize Motivation

a. Track information carefully and consistently—and use it to help students see their growth. In order to know whether students are learning, you must do more than just grade assignments. You also need to track and analyze the data you collect. Without regularly entering student data into your tracking system you will be unable to know if your instruction has been effective or if you are on track to meet your goals. Tracking allows you to analyze student results, notice trends in student mastery, and adjust your actions accordingly. Because of this, it is essential for successful

Each quarter, I hang up our class's language arts and math objectives. This provides a strong visual reminder that reinforces the importance of showing up prepared to learn, and also to track the class's academic accomplishments. As we check off objectives mastered by the class, we also highlight those objectives that we needed to revisit for extra reinforcement.

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teaching. Many new teachers do not track frequently enough because they forget its importance and fail to make it a priority amidst all of the other things they need to accomplish. To avoid this from happening, you should commit to making tracking a habit. Schedule time each week to record your students' performance on the assessments you administer. Doing this will allow you to clearly view student progress toward your goals and to adjust your short and long-term planning.

When filling out report cards, you may find it useful to draw evidence from each major component of your instructional program (e.g., homework, class work, participation in class discussions, and notes). By tracking progress in all areas of your class, you send a message to your students that all that you ask them to do is valuable and important in their learning. It is also important to keep this information neat and organized, as parents and principals may ask to see your grade book. See a sample computerized gradebook in the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (p. 108); the Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. 🛠 While you should track a variety of information, you should also make sure that you have a tracking tool that highlights *only* academic mastery and progress without other student information (like attendance, homework, etc.). It is important to have a place where you can exclusively view student and class academic progress toward your big goal. This tool serves as your guide to making important instructional decisions, so it needs to be clear and easy to interpret. Separating academic mastery data from additional student information will allow you to view this clear picture of student progress on your learning goals. Again, this does not mean that you shouldn't track student participation, homework completion, and other relevant student actions. Just be sure to put this information in a separate document from your main academic tracking tool.

b. Consider students' objective and relative success. Similarly, your reporting system should take into account both the students' level of mastery (where they are) and their relative progress toward the goals (how far they've come) through effective effort. Some report cards, especially at the elementary level, will have separate categories for effort and achievement. In class and with parents, these teachers emphasize the effort grade is just as important as the achievement grade. "I always tell my kids that children who work hard and show growth are the real heroes," one teacher reports. "Going from knowing three of your times tables to eight of them is much more exciting than coming into class knowing nine and leaving knowing nine." We talk more about balancing these two considerations in Chapter Eight, Differentiation.

Annika's Mastery Sheet (U = unsatisfactory, G = gaining proficiency, P = proficient, E = excellent)	Sept. 2	Apr. 18	Apr. 25	May 1	May 8
Identify numerators/denominators	E	*	*	*	*
Explain purpose of fractions	U	P	E	*	*
Represent fractions w/ manipulatives	U	P	P	E	*
Add/subtract fractions (one denom.)	U	G	G	P	E
Find least common multiple	U	U	U	P	E
Add/subtract fractions (2 denoms.)	U	U	U	G	P
Multiply fractions	U	P	P	E	*
Explain reciprocals	U	P	P	E	*
Divide fractions	U	P	P	P	E

While you may be required to record achievement on an absolute scale on a report card every term, you will not want to relent on important objectives just because that marking period is over; some students simply need more time to make gains. The most effective teachers administer multiple, varied assessments on an ongoing basis to provide students with repeated opportunities to demonstrate mastery. By doing this, students can make progress and improve their performance over time. To aide this process, teachers not only record summative scores, but also maintain "mastery sheets" to track student proficiency on individual objectives (see Annika's Mastery Sheet). These sheets show children the growth they've made and the areas they need to improve. They also can serve as the primary, on-going means of communicating progress to parents.

Recording Results Effectively

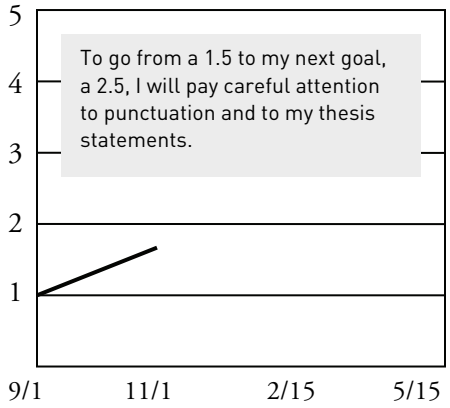
As you learned in the Unit Planning and Differentiation chapters, effective teachers maintain tracking systems that identify which objectives individual students and the class as a whole have mastered or need help with (see Ms. Cotner's Progress Chart). These lists can indicate when to vary questions during class, what objectives need to be re-taught or reviewed during the year, and when to schedule tutoring (either after school or through individualized practice during class), in order to help students solidify skills until they meet grade-level standards. Final exam grades, which usually carry a lot of weight in a final average, and standardized test scores, which some states link to grade level promotion, will reflect your continued efforts, even if individual marking period grades do not. If one goal of assessment is for students themselves to know where they are in comparison with their goals and what they need to do to make further growth, "mastery sheets" help facilitate this process. The **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** contains another example of a teacher's "Teacher's Mastery Checklist", as well as a "Student's Mastery Checklist" and "Charts that Track Progress Over Time" (pp. 109-112); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. 🛠

Ms. Cotner's Progress Chart Chapter 2 Section A **Overall Class Average: 83%**	*Student Mastery Average (in %)*	Read 2-Digit Numbers	Read 3-Digit Numbers	Read 4-Digit Numbers	Read 5-Digit Numbers	Read 6-Digit Numbers	Read 7-Digit Numbers	Represent A 2-Digit Number With Manipulatives
Class Mastery Average by skill (in %)		**98**	**90**	**83**	**75**	**70**	**69**	**95**
Joseph	**84**	100	90	85	80	70	70	95
Millie	**91**	100	95	95	85	85	80	100
Raymond	**80**	100	85	80	75	65	65	90
Destiny	**75**	90	90	75	60	60	60	95

Mastery tracking sheets and progress charts allow students and teachers to see both growth and areas of needed improvement.

Just as teachers self-assess to determine what questioning techniques they are using or whether they have been sending consistent messages about expectations, students can assess their performance against a standard to guide their own learning. By learning to ask themselves certain questions, students can develop the important skill of accurate self-assessment. A third grader can learn to ask herself whether a story she writes has a beginning, a middle, and an end. By practicing this skill, she can be her own editor. Similarly, a tenth grade student can learn to ask himself whether he has provided adequate evidence to support his point—be it on a history report, a geometry proof, or a science lab.

The best teachers clearly communicate to students their progress as well as why they have or have not demonstrated mastery on different objectives. One of the best ways to help students compare their work to the ultimate goals is to use a rubric. Chapter 2 explains in detail that rubrics clearly define expectations for student achievement by delineating different levels of quality for a project, paper, or presentation. Rubrics give teachers clear criteria when assessing student



By using the same writing rubric all year, students can graph their progress and set short and long-term goals for themselves, pinpointing an area of concentrated effort for each goal-setting session.

performance, but just as importantly, rubrics give students clear expectations for that performance. If students fully understand the requirements for success, they will be more motivated to achieve. Armed with that information, students can also refer to the requirements throughout the process of creating the final product, constantly evaluating their progress towards the highest level of achievement. Some writing teachers use the same rubric all year and have students chart their progress on a graph (see example), setting goals along the way. Look in the **Instructional Planning & Development Toolkit** for more information on rubrics (pp. 19-21: "Rubrics"). 🛠

My students keep track of their own grades and write their own progress reports, which I sign off on. Each student has a grading folder with a grade-tracker for labs (15% of their grade), miscellaneous work (15%), and unit texts (70%). We enter grades as a class on Mondays. Every few weeks they add up their earned points and divide by their possible points; they then weight each category and add up the totals for a final grade. It helps the students to understand where their grades come from and to accept responsibility for poor grades.

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c. Employ a transparent grading formula. Ensure that both students and families know what information will be considered in calculating grades, including: the objectives to be learned, the level of performance that you expect your students to demonstrate in order to earn particular grades, and the evidence that you will draw upon to evaluate achievement of these objectives. This shared knowledge of expectations for successful performance will help foster a culture in which students do not depend solely on your evaluation of their work as an indicator of its relative merit, but can independently evaluate their work against the criteria.

d. Report progress in multiple ways. The report card need not be the only time that parents are aware of their child's grades. Require parents to sign tests. Send home regular academic and behavioral updates. Be sure to use regular opportunities to let your students know that you notice their progress by developing growing lists in your classroom of students who have mastered specific learning goals. Use parent phone calls to relay news of consistent effort, or dramatic improvement. It's quite possible that they will have never received such a call before. A sample Report Card is included in the **Instructional Planning & Delivery** Toolkit (pp. 113-114), which can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. 🛠

e. Respond to student work with timely and meaningful feedback.
Whatever form your assessment takes, once your students' thinking is visible and you have a clear picture of what students understand, you can then go back and provide helpful guidance and feedback. Effective grading should communicate to students their strengths and weaknesses on different objectives so that they understand their progress toward the big goal and what they need to do in order to improve. You should clearly illuminate to students *why* they have or have not met the bar of mastery on different goals by providing qualitative feedback and explaining your grading system's rationale. Don't simply give students a score without helping them to interpret the meaning and implications of their grade. When you make your grading transparent to students, you allow them to clearly understand their progress and how to improve their performance. This in turn can invest them in taking action to further their own academic development.

Sample Peer Feedback Questions
1. What were the take-home messages of the speech? What details supported those ideas?
2. What did you notice about your classmates' volume, eye contact and tone? How did that affect the speech?
3. What visual aids did the speaker use? How were they helpful to you as an audience member?
4. What would make this speech even better?

Recording Results Effectively

While providing students with positive feedback is important, constant and/or vague praise can cut off discussion and encourage complacency. When students demonstrate progress, praise should be sincere, specific, and focused on their effort. (e.g., "You did a terrific job checking your work and fixing mistakes;" "You provided excellent detail in this story;" "Your comments in class were very responsive to other students;" "It's impressive to see how closely you are listening.")
At the same time, mistakes should be viewed as learning opportunities and necessary steps to success, not as indications that the student has failed to learn. During class, you should rarely ignore incorrect answers (though you may want to hear other students' answers before you address the mistake), and in fact, you may want to spend more time analyzing incorrect answers than you do going over correct ones. Mistakes offer a valuable opportunity to dispel underlying misunderstandings that might also be held by others in the class. Moreover, the process of discussing errors helps every student, even those who got the problem right the first time; in fact, one of the best ways to deepen one's understanding is through analyzing misunderstanding.

In addition to providing their own feedback to students, teachers can play a significant role in creating an effective dynamic of peer feedback. Peer feedback should be provided in an environment where students value one another's learning efforts. As much as possible, you should guide students to offer feedback in a constructive manner, and to depersonalize the give and take of feedback so that it is focused on the ideas and not the person. By providing questionnaires that structure students' comments (see example), peers can learn to be descriptive and objective, rather than biting, in their feedback; they may also be able to apply the lessons they learned from the feedback process to improving their own work.

Conclusion

This supplement aims to help you plan a fair and accurate grading system for your classroom. We have seen that recording and reporting results takes careful planning and thoughtful strategy to ensure that data is reflective of actual student achievement and that students can see their performance as a work in progress that they will continue to hone.

- Plan ahead to create a comprehensive grading system that makes distinctions in quality between different student performances and distinctions in importance between different assignments.

- In order to ensure that your students' grades are reflective of their best possible scholastic performance, you should separate non-academic performance from your calculation of grades. Your system should also consider students with special needs, as well as the margin of error in borderline cases of promotion or retention.

- When reporting results, motivate students by charting their growth and giving meaningful feedback that informs students of their progress, why they have succeeded or failed to meet mastery, and what they need to do in order to improve.