



ACTIVITY 3.5

A Rubric for Sound Grading Practice

PURPOSE

The rubric that follows supports the three principles for grading we recommend:

1. The purpose of grades is to communicate
2. Grades should communicate only about student achievement
3. Grades should reflect the current level of achievement

The rubric reflects what we support in sound grading practice—that is, grading practices that best communicate classroom assessment both *of* and *for* learning results. Any mark or grade is only as good as the assessment(s) on which it was based. For that reason, to use the rubric fully, it helps for both leaders and teachers to have a foundational knowledge of sound classroom assessment practices.

TIME

1 hour

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Copies of the grading rubric for each participant
- Copies of school/district grading policies

SUGGESTED ROOM SETUP

Tables and chairs set up for easy analysis and discussion among participants

DIRECTIONS

Use the rubric (Figure 3.4) as a discussion starter for both practice and policy. Analyze your staff practices to see how nearly they approach the stated grading guidelines. Analyze your current school/district policies on grading regarding what is currently in them relative to the rubric and what is missing. What steps would you need to take to align your grading policies and staff practices with these guidelines?

Figure 3.4 Rubric for Sound Grading Practice

Criterion	Beginning	Development	Fluent
1. Organizing the Gradebook	The evidence of learning (e.g., a gradebook) is entirely organized by sources of information (tests, quizzes, homework, labs, etc.).	The evidence of learning (e.g., a gradebook) is organized by sources of information mixed with specific content standards.	The evidence of learning (e.g., a gradebook) is completely organized by student learning outcomes (content standards, benchmarks, grade level indicators, curriculum expectations).
2. Including Factors in the Grade	Overall summary grades are based on a mix of achievement and nonachievement factors (e.g., timeliness of work, attitude, effort, cheating). Nonachievement factors have a major impact on grades.	Overall summary grades are based on a mix of achievement and nonachievement factors, but achievement counts a lot more.	Overall summary grades are based on achievement only.
	Extra credit points are given for extra work completed; without connection to extra learning.	Some extra credit points are given for extra work completed; some extra credit work is used to provide extra evidence of student learning.	Extra credit work is evaluated for quality and is only used to provide extra evidence of learning. Credit is not awarded merely for completion of work.
	Cheating, late work, and missing work result in a zero (or lower score) in the gradebook. There is no opportunity to make up work, except in a few cases.	Cheating, late work, and missing work result in a zero (or lower score) in the gradebook. But there is an opportunity to make up work and replace the zero or raise the lower score.	Cheating, late work, and missing work is recorded as “incomplete” or “not enough information” rather than “0.” There is an opportunity to replace an incomplete with a score without penalty.
	Borderline cases are handled by considering nonachievement factors.	Borderline cases are handled by considering a combination of nonachievement factors and collecting evidence of student learning.	Borderline grade cases are handled by collecting additional evidence of student achievement, not by counting nonachievement factors.
3. Considering Assessment Purpose	Everything each student does is given a score, and every score goes into the final grade. There is no distinction between scores on practice work (formative assessment or many types of homework) and scores on work to demonstrate level of achievement (summative assessment).	Some distinctions are made between formative (practice such as homework) and summative assessment, but practice work still constitutes a significant part of the grade.	Student work is assessed frequently (formative assessment) and graded occasionally (summative assessment). Scores on formative assessments and other practice work (e.g., homework) are used descriptively to inform teachers and students of what has been learned and the next steps in learning. Grades are based only on summative assessments.

(Continued)

Figure 3.4 (Continued)

Criterion	Beginning	Development	Fluent
4. Considering Most Recent Information	All assessment data is cumulative and used in calculating a final summative grade. No consideration is given to identifying or using the most current information.	More current evidence is given consideration at times but does not entirely replace out-of-date evidence.	Most recent evidence completely replaces out-of-date evidence when it is reasonable to do so. For example, how well students write at the end of the grading period is more important than how well they wrote at the beginning, and later evidence of improved content understanding is more important than early evidence.
5. Summarizing Information and Determining Final Grade	The gradebook has a mixture of ABC, percentages, +/-, and/or rubric scores with no explanation of how they are to be combined into a final summary grade.	The gradebook may or may not have a mixture of symbols, but there is some attempt, even if incomplete, to explain how to combine them.	The gradebook may or may not have a mix of symbol types, but there is a sound explanation of how to combine them.
	Rubric scores are converted to percentages when averaged with other scores, or there is no provision for combining rubric and percentage scores.	Rubric scores are not directly converted to percentages; some type of decision rule is used, the final grade many times does not best depict level of student achievement.	Rubric scores are converted to a final grade using a decision rule that results in an accurate depiction of the level of student attainment of the learning targets.
	Final summary grades are based on a curve—a student's place in the rank order of student achievement.	Final grades are criterion referenced, not norm referenced. They are based on preset standards such as A = 90%–100% and B = 80%–89%. But, there is no indication of the necessity to ensure shared meaning of symbols—i.e., there is no definition of each standard.	Final grades are criterion referenced, not norm referenced. They are based on preset standards with clear descriptions of what each symbol means. These descriptions go beyond A = 90%–100% and B = 80%–89%; they describe what A, B, and so on performance looks like.
	Final grades for special needs students are not based on learning targets as specified in the individual education program (IEP).	There is an attempt to base final grades for special needs students on learning targets in the IEP, but the attempt is not always successful, or it is not clear to all parties that modified learning targets are used to assign a grade.	Final grades for special needs students are criterion referenced, and indicate level of attainment of the learning goals as specified in the IEP. The targets on which grades are based are clear to all parties.
	Final summary grades are based on calculation of mean (average) only.	The teacher understands various measures of central tendency, but may not always choose the best one to accurately describe student achievement.	The teacher understands various measures of central tendency (average, median, mode) and understands when each is the most appropriate one to use to accurately describe student learning.

Criterion	Beginning	Development	Fluent
6. Verifying Assessment Quality	There is little evidence of consideration of the accuracy/quality of the individual assessments on which grades are based.	The teacher tries to base grades on accurate assessment results only but may not consciously understand all the features of a sound assessment.	Grades are based only on accurate assessment results. Questionable results are not included.
	Quality standards for classroom assessment are not considered and the teacher has trouble articulating standards for quality.	Some standards of quality are adhered to in judging the accuracy of the assessment results on which grades are based. The teacher can articulate some of these standards, or uses standards for quality assessment intuitively, but has trouble articulating why an assessment is sound.	The teacher can articulate standards of quality and can show evidence of consideration of these standards in his or her classroom assessments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and appropriate learning targets • clear and appropriate for users and uses • sound assessment design (proper method, quality exercises, sound sampling, minimum bias) • effective communication of results
	Assessments are rarely modified for special needs students when such modifications would provide much more accurate information about student learning.	Assessments are modified for special needs students, but the procedures used may not result in accurate information and/or match provisions in the IEP.	Assessments are modified for special needs students in ways that match instructional modifications described in IEPs. Such modifications result in generating accurate information on student achievement.
7. Student Involvement	Grades are a surprise to students because (a) students don't understand the bases on which grades are determined; (b) students have not been involved in their own assessment (learning targets are not clear to them, and/or they do not self-assess and track progress toward the targets); or (c) teacher feedback is only evaluative (a judgment of level of quality) and includes no descriptive component.	Grades are somewhat of a surprise to students because student-involvement practices and descriptive feedback are too limited to give them insights into the nature of the learning targets being pursued and their own performance.	Grades are not a surprise to students because (a) students understand the basis for the grades received; (b) students have been involved in their own assessment throughout the process (they understand the learning targets they are to hit, self-assess in relation to the targets, track their own progress toward the targets, and/or talk about their progress); and/or (c) teacher communication to students is frequent, descriptive, and focuses on what they have learned as well as the next steps in learning. Descriptive feedback is related directly to specific and clear learning targets.

Source: Based on suggestions from Ken O'Connor (personal communication, 2003).