

Seven Perspectives on Grading

Ken O'Connor (2002). How to Grade for Learning

1. *Grading is not essential for learning.*

- a. Guskey (1996): “Teachers do not need grades or reporting forms to teach well, and students can and do learn well without them.”
- b. Stiggins (1992): “Students succeed if only they feel capable of doing so. If they lack either desire or confidence, they will not be successful. Therefore the essential question is a dual one: How do we help our students want to learn and feel capable of learning?”

2. *Grading is complicated.*

- a. Grades are shorthand — symbols for performance.
- b. Decision of how to crunch numbers, how to weigh performance, etc.

3. *Grading is subjective and emotional.*

- a. O'Connor (2002): “Grades are as much a matter of values as they are of science—all along the assessment trail, the teacher has made value judgments about what type of assessment to use, what to include in each assessment, how the assessment is scored, the actual scoring of the assessment, and why the scores are to be combined in a particular way to arrive at a final grade.”
- b. Wiggins (2000): “The question is not whether it is subjective, but whether the scoring system is defensive and credible.”

4. *Grading is inescapable.*

- a. Wiggins (1996): “Trying to get rid of familiar letter grades gets the matter backwards while leading to needless political battles... it is more productive to make grades better.”
- b. Haladyna (1999): “The harmful effects of grades can be eliminated by changes in grading systems that provide more chances for success, guidance, feedback, re-instruction, and encouragement.”

5. *Grading has a limited research base.*

- a. Frary, Gross, and Weber (1992): “Large proportions of teachers hold opinions and pursue practices contrary to what many measurement specialists would recommend.”
- b. Stiggins, Frisbie, and Griswold (1989): Three reasons why teachers ignore expert advice: “recommendations may be opinion or philosophical position rather than established fact; recommendations may be unrealistic in actual classroom practice; and recommendations may be outside the knowledge base of teachers.”

6. *Grading has no single best practice.*

- a. O'Connor (2002): “When grades are the prime or major component of the decision-making process, there needs to be greater consistency, at least within a school and one hopes, across a school district.”

7. *Grading that is faulty damages students — and teachers.*

- a. O'Connor (2002): “Overemphasis of grades and faulty grading practices have detrimental effects on student achievement, motivation, and self concept... Faulty grading also damages the interpersonal relationship on which good teaching and effective learning depend. This problem occurs at least partly because of teachers’ dual roles as coach and judge.”
- b. O'Connor (2002): “Teachers must not see grades as weapons of control, but rather use grading as a professional exercise to enhance learning.”

How Learning is Defined

Cathy Vatterott (2015) Rethinking Grading

Standards-Based Paradigm	Traditional Grading Paradigm
Higher-order thinking skills	Low-level rote knowledge
Applying, analyzing, synthesizing	Knowing and Understanding
Learning defined by what students can do with what they know	Learning defined by what students know
Evidence of learning is using skills in new situations	Evidence of learning is repeating back
Rigor is complexity	Rigor is coverage

Your Response:

How Learning is Structured

Cathy Vatterott (2015) Rethinking Grading

Standards-Based Grading Paradigm	Results	Traditional Grading Paradigm	Results
Learning is differentiated to enable mastery	Learning is more efficient	Whole class — all get same instruction, homework, test	Only students who learn well from that method succeed
Time to learn varies, achievement is fixed	More students achieve mastery	Time to learn is fixed, achievement varies	Learners who need more time are penalized
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment is a continuous process • Feedback loop: teach, check, apply learning, feedback 	“I can keep working and take the assessment when I am confident that I understand.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One shot learning • Grades are permanent • Teach – test – move on 	Speed = intelligence

Your Response:

Standards-Based Grading Contrasted with Traditional Grading

Ken O'Connor (2002). How to Grade for Learning

Guideline	Standards-Based	Traditional
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly related to standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually related to assessment methods
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criterion-referenced standards • Public criteria/targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often norm-referenced or a mix of criterion and norm referenced • Criteria unclear or assumed to be known
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement only • Individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertain mix of achievement, attitude, effort, and behavior • Often include group marks
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From summative assessments only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From formative and summative assessments
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More recent information only • Reassessment without penalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything marked included • Multiple assessments recorded as average not best
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited and careful “number crunching” • Use of median/mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many formulas and calculations • Always use means (“average”)
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derived from quality assessments • Data carefully recorded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huge variation in assessment quality • Often only stored in teachers’ heads
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All aspects discussed with and understood by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher decides and announces

Guidelines for Grading in a Standards-Based System

Ken O'Connor (2002). How to Grade for Learning

1. Relate grading procedures to learning goals.

- a. Marzano and Kendall (1996): "First and foremost, the teacher must stop thinking in terms of assignments, tests and activities to which points are assigned, and start thinking in terms of level of performance in the declarative and procedural knowledge specific to her subject area."
- b. O'Connor (2002): Teachers should link grades to learning goals not assessment methods. Reporting should allow for detailed information on learning goals.

2. Use criterion-referenced performance standards as reference points to determine grades.

- a. Glasser (1990): "No student grade should ever depend on what other students do."
- b. Spady (1991): "Criteria need to be focused on the true culminating outcomes of significance for our students—not on all the daily details and work tasks."
- c. Stiggins (2001b): "How are teachers to provide dependable information about student achievement if the targets are not defined?"

3. Limit the valued attributes included in grades to individual achievement. (Effort, participation, getting work in on time.)

- a. Stiggins and Knight (1997) "When the object is effective communication of achievement ... schools should adopt grading policies that permit teachers to indicate each student's current level of achievement with nothing else factored in to interfere with that message."
- b. Gronlund and Linn (1990): "Letter grades are likely to be most meaningful and useful when they represent achievement only. If they are contaminated by such extraneous factors as effort, the amount of work completed (rather than quality of the work), personal conduct and so on, their interpretation will be hopelessly confused. When letter grades combine various aspects of pupil development, not only do they lose their meaning as a measure of achievement, but they also suppress information concerning other aspects of development."

4. Sample student performance — do not include all scores in grades.

- a. Black and Wiliam (1998): "Culture of success — advice on what each student can do to improve and self assessment by pupils involving thoughtful reflection in which all pupils can be encouraged to take part."
- b. Chapman (1993): "Daily quizzes, interim tasks, single journal entries, and other contributing pieces and checks for understanding may merit a + or – mark, but don't merit intense bean counting."
- c. Spady (1987): Mistakes are inherent elements in the journey toward learning competence. Grades that label those mistakes and make their consequences irreversible which is counter to the notion of human growth and our inherent potential for change and improvement."

5. Grade in pencil — keep records so they can be updated easily.

- a. Guskey (1996): "What information provides the most accurate description of students' learning at this time? In nearly all cases the answer is *the most current information*. If students demonstrate that past assessment information no longer accurately reflects their learning, that information must be dropped and replaced by the new information. Continuing to rely on past assessment data miscommunicates student learning."

- b. Ken O'Connor (2002): "Improvement is best considered as a reporting variable and not primarily as a grading variable. Grades then are based on students' most consistent level of achievement with special consideration for more recent achievement."
- c. Ebert (1992): "Second chances do not just appear, nor do they naturally work out without some evidence (of students) using past mistakes to enhance future success. Therefore, reassessment is the opportunity and students learn the responsibility."

6. *Crunch numbers carefully, if at all.*

- a. Reeves (2000): "The consequence for a student who fails to meet a standard is not a low grade but rather the opportunity — indeed the requirement — to resubmit his or her work."
- b. Guskey (1996): "If the purpose of grading and reporting is to provide an accurate description of what the students have learned, then averaging must be considered inadequate and inappropriate."
- c. O'Connor (2002): "Teachers should consider the effects of various ways of calculating central tendency; the effect of extreme marks, especially zeros; how scores and/or learning goals should be weighted; how to include nontraditional scores (e.g., rubrics) in grades; and the possible use of I grades (Incomplete)."

7. *Use quality assessment(s) and properly record evidence of achievement.*

- a. O'Connor (2002): "Marks and grades are meaningful when, and only when, they are based on quality assessment. 1) Setting clear and appropriate targets {knowledge, applications, dispositions}, 2) Stating clear purpose, 3) Matching target to method, 4) Selecting appropriate samples for learning domain, and 5) Controlling interference or distortion."

8. *Discuss and involve students in assessment, including grading, throughout the teaching and learning process.*

- a. Gregory, Cameron, and Davies (1997): "When students take part in developing criteria, they are much more likely to understand what is expected of them, 'buy in,' and then accomplish the task successfully."
- b. Sperling (1993): "The results far outweigh the effort. Because criteria are clearly spelled out, students can take responsibility to evaluate their own work. They compare their self-assessment with the teacher's assessment, set goals for future work, and initiate corrective action to improve their own work."
- c. Schaefer (1997): "Tests and other assessments should not surprise students. They should be aware of the learning goals and understand what they will be asked to do to provide evidence of their learning. This does not mean that teachers should 'teach to the test'; it means that teachers must 'test the teaching' in a way which is fair and reasonable for their students."

Four Psycho-Social Attributes and its Impact on Student Achievement

Kallick and Zmuda (2017). Students at the Center: Personalizing learning with habits of mind

There are four research-based psycho-social attributes that positively impact student achievement regardless of instructional model (Farrington, A.L. et.al., 2012). But for students and teachers to engage in the messiness of personalized learning, we contend that these attributes are essential: relevance, growth mindset, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging. Let's explore each of these attributes in more detail and see how they are instrumental to personalized learning.



Relevance: *“This work has value for me.”* The work challenges me to apply my understanding to complex and intriguing problems. Students immerse themselves in an idea or investigation because they believe it can impact on themselves and others. Teachers network with experts and colleagues to design authentic problems, challenges, and ideas; authentic criteria based on industry standards or professional expectations; and/or authentic audiences for students to share their work and receive feedback to improve. *Related HOM: Remaining open to continuous learning; Questioning and problem posing; Drawing from past knowledge and applying it to new situations.*

Growth mindset: *“My ability and confidence grow with my effort.”* The belief that I can learn — realizing that I can get better. Students persist realizing that they can improve whether success

comes easily or proves to be more elusive. The teacher provides candid and constructive feedback to facilitate thinking and development. There is real courage in the act of sharing work and being open to improvement. This necessitates the learner's capacity take responsible risks, to remain open to continuous learning, to think flexibly, and to persist.

Self-efficacy: "I can succeed at this." Managing the learning: how I plan for, act on, and monitor my own progress as I am learning. Students manage their learning using tools to manage time, resources, and work with others; take ownership for learning plan and progress monitoring; and reflect on progress toward reaching goals. The teacher provides strategies and tools for self-management (e.g., organizational tools, time-management tools) to encourage students to accomplish goals and reflect upon what they are learning as they progress toward goals. Identifying curation tools (e.g., Evernote, Live Binder), project management tools (e.g., Trello, Benjamin), graphic organizer tools (e.g., Ideament, Total Recall), collaboration tools (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout, Edmodo), and learner management tools (e.g., Schoology, Bloomboard, Epiphany). Students continue to reflect on how new and existing tools assist them in a given project and overall value with helping to manage impulsivity, think about their thinking, striving for accuracy, and communicating with clarity and precision.

Sense of belonging: "I belong in this academic community." How I am accepted — how I fit within the community and accept/celebrate differences. Students find value in listening to and interacting with others. The teacher sets up and ensures a safe, respectful environment that is primarily a collaborative learning partnership. Many teachers build a classroom community by working with the students to establish ground rules for behaving, circles based on restorative justice, or other ways in which students can give feedback to one another as they learn develop important social skills. Students and teachers think interdependently; listen with understanding and empathy; and respond with wonderment and awe.

How Learning is Experienced

Cathy Vatterott (2015) Rethinking Grading

Standards-Based Grading Paradigm	Results	Traditional Grading Paradigm	Results
Defines learning as hard and frustrating but achievable	Reinforces growth mindset	Learning is expected to be error-free — mistakes are punished	Reinforces fixed mindset — “I’m just not smart.”
Mistakes are a natural part of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned optimism • Perseverance 	Students are judged with grades while still learning	Fear of failure
<p>Lack of understanding is a puzzle, not a validation of stupidity</p> <p>Struggle is good but with support</p>	Students’ beliefs empower them to achieve	Failure is a judgment and a validation of ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggling students avoid learning • Teacher rescues struggling learners • Learned helplessness

Your Response:

How Grades are Used

Cathy Vatterott (2015) Rethinking Grading

Standards-Based Grading Paradigm	Results	Traditional Grading Paradigm	Results
Locus of control — student	Student motivation — intrinsic based on progress toward mastery	Locus of control — teacher	Student motivation — extrinsic based on reward and punishment
Form of control — individual learning progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is the goal • Only way to win the game is to get better at learning • Cheating doesn't help you learn or pass the assessment 	Form of control — points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade is the goal • <i>Quid pro quo</i>: "I work, you pay." • Gaming the system • Cheating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only learning counts in the grade • Feedback directs learning • Work habits and life skills are shown as a separate category on report card 	Grades more accurately reflect learning, not amount of work or compliance	Everything counts — grades punish behaviors such as non-completion and cheating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaming the system • Grade grubbing • Grade vs. learning mismatch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework is not graded — it is used to check for understanding and provide feedback • We don't keep score during practice 	It is safe to make mistakes and take risks in learning	Grading during learning — grading homework, including late penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penalizes students for taking risks • Breeds hopelessness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test for mastery • Grade in pencil • Grades can be improved • More recent information replaces old information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's OK not to get it right away • Redemption is possible 	All grades are permanent and averaged together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One bad grade seals your fate • F — the gift that keeps on giving • Mistakes are permanent (no redemption)

Relationships between Grading Guidelines and Issues/Concerns
Ken O'Connor (2002). How to Grade for Learning

Guideline	Issue	Concern
1	Basis for grades: assessment methods or learning goals	Which groupings — standards/strands?
2	Reference points: standards norm or criterion referenced	Performance standards — what? How good is good enough?
3	Ingredients: Achievement, behavior	Learning skills, work habits, effort, late assignments, group grades, marks
4	Sources of information: formative, summative, variety	Tests? Quizzes? Homework? How much data? Variety of types of assessment?
5	Changing grades	Second or multiple opportunity evaluation? Recent or all information method of calculation?
6	Number crunching: mean, median, mode	Role of professional judgment; effect of zeros/missed work, # points on scale
7	Quality Record keeping	E.g. fairness; time on tests, management, tracking system
8	Student understanding	Clear criteria How much student involvement?