



PDS0103

Helping Every Child Succeed

By Dr. Cindy Whaley



Module #5: Grading Techniques



Correct Terminology When Assessing Students



Testing



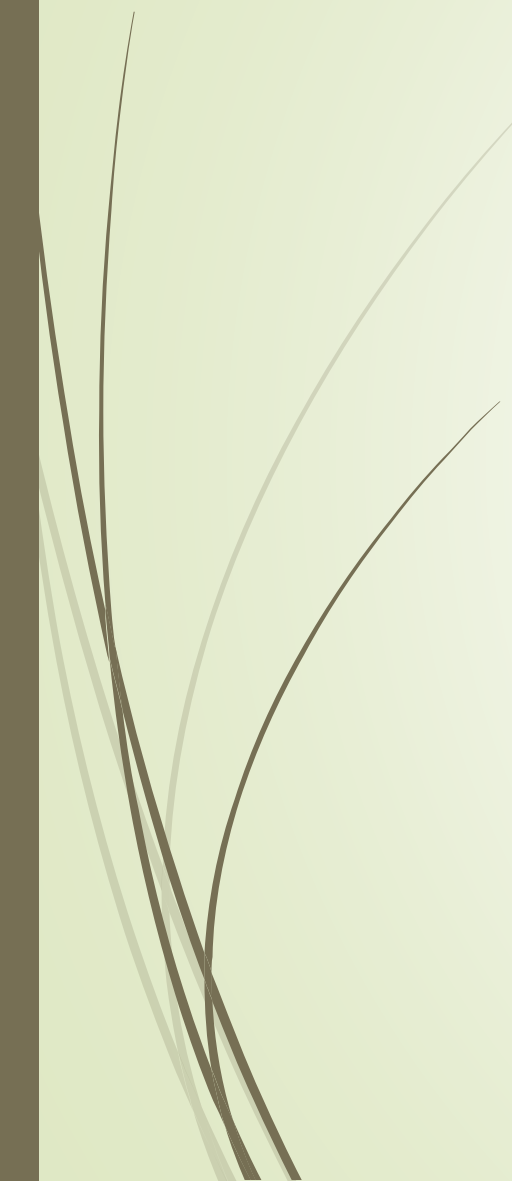
Testing is a method of determining what someone knows. We usually think of teacher-generated tests as multiple-choice, true/false, or essay questions. Tests may not actually measure what teachers want student to know or be able to do as a result of studying a particular topic.

Tests often do and can, however, label students-as in “Yep, she’s an ‘A’ student” or “I expect him to be average, and this ‘C’ confirms it!” These arbitrary labels – grades particularly – don’t usually take teachers on an educational journey of understanding their students’ needs.



Evaluation

Evaluation is the most dangerous word commonly used in place of assessment. Evaluation is a judgment of a student's performance. Most evaluation of student learning use external sources instead of being personally generated by students. The typical end products of evaluation are grades.





Evaluating students does the following to *them*:

- labels them, as in “proficient,” “below grade level,” “basic,” “gifted,” “learning disabled,” “an ‘A’ student,” or “just an ‘average’ Joe”
- compares one student to another
- tracks them in homogenous groups based on ability

Evaluation



Evaluation does *nothing* to help students understand their current skill level, abilities in specific content areas, their amount of effort, or their attitudes towards learning.

It creates a label that students use to determine their future efforts and attitudes towards learning.

Assessment is...

Assessment has a more generalized meaning testing, grading or evaluation. D. Brown (2002) the following meaning:

“The historical origin of the word assess is a Latin, *assidere*, meaning ‘to sit by’ (American Heritage Dictionary 2000, 108). Seems a perfect description of the requirements to determine what students really know – sit by them!”

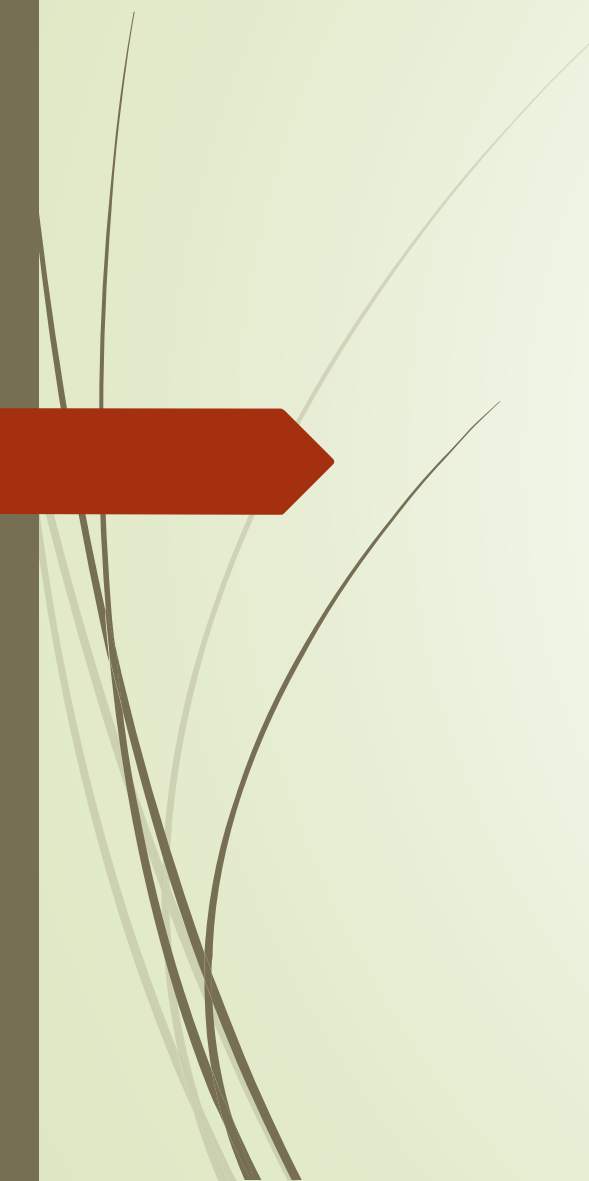




Assessment is...

Assessment is a set of strategies for discovering what students know or can do as a result of engaging in learning experiences. It is a comprehensive act that includes consideration of a student's goals for learning, processes of learning, progression toward established goals, and revision of goals when needed.

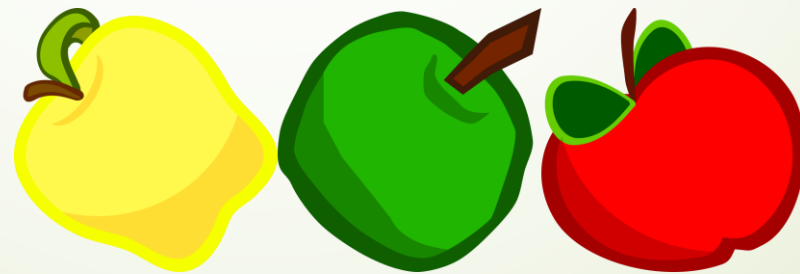
All assessment should have as its primary purpose the improvement of student learning. All instruction should be informed by what we learn about students in formal or informal ways.



All assessment should
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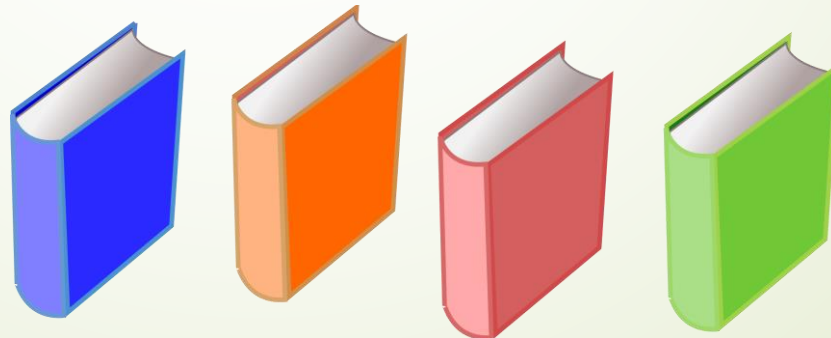
3 Types of Assessment


1. Traditional
2. Alternative
3. Authentic



4 Ways to Assess

1. Teacher -> Student
2. Student -> Student
3. Student -> Self
4. Student -> Teacher





“ We will need to rethink why we assess, what we assess, how we assess it, and what we do with the results. ”

~ Rick Stiggins, 2017



“

Faculty must own [assessment]
and live it in the context of
each student.

~ Molly Corbett Broad

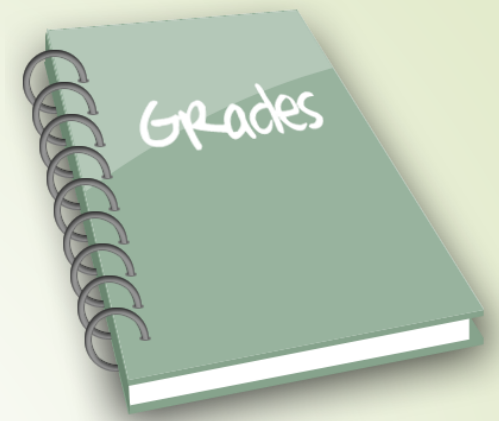
President of the American Council of Education

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Grading For Student Learning

Grading



Grading is merely a component of evaluation and is an arbitrary label used to place students along a continuum, from best to worst to compare student with one another.

Grades in any format such as *A to F*, *satisfactory*, or *at grade level*, describe student performance during a period of time on a number of tasks. Although grading has a strong tradition, a number of problems exist with this practice.



Grading

According to Tombari and Borich (1999) “[Grades] assume equal amounts of learning have occurred for individuals who achieve the same grade, fail to acknowledge continues progress or develop in learning, and may mask an individuals student’s learning strengths and needs.”

Marzano (2000) noted, “Grades are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless. This straightforward but depressing fact is usually painfully obvious when one examines the research and practice regarding grades with a critical eye.”




What is the purpose of grading?

Grades should answer the question, “At this time, what is the status of this student’s learning on this standard (or in this subject)?”

Grades should indicate achievement no matter what the report card looks like or what scale the report card requires you to use.

The purpose of grading is to summarize and report – to the students, parents and others – students’ achievement of learning goals. Sometimes this is called achievement of intended learning outcomes.

These are the same thing, assuming that the outcomes measured by various assessments do in fact match intended learning goals or standards. This is an important assumption that needs to be checked.



Why is it important to grade on standards for achievement?

- When a teacher places a grade next to the report card category “Mathematics,” for example, students and parents expect that grade to be a measure of learning in mathematics for the report period in question. No matter what kind of report card you use - traditional, standard-based, or some other format - this expectation holds. *Importantly, people make decisions as if this were the case.* For example, students’ grades in middle school help determine how they are placed in high school.
- Grading on standards for achievement gives information to teachers as well as students. Schools, grade-level teams, and subject-area departments need information on student learning in order to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction. Students need information on what they know and can do in order to adjust studying practices, ask for help as needed, and make informed decisions about their futures.
- Grading on achievement is the way you follow up on implicit promise to students inherent in sitting them down in your classroom for a year, namely, “You will learn something in my class.”



What is the *Motivation Connection*?

Grades that indicate student achievement of intended learning outcomes support student self-regulation of learning by giving students dependable information about what they know and can do. When grades reflect student learning, students can

- Self-assess, set learning goals, track progress, and persist in learning.
- Understanding their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Make informed decisions about their studying.
- Develop healthy beliefs about learning.
- Make sound choices for their future.

When grades do not reflect student achievement (e.g., when grade contain information about aspects of assignments not related to learning, like having a pretty cover report), students cannot regulate their learning in these ways.



How can I grade for student learning?

Some grading practices that result in grades that reflect learning require attention to both individual assessment and report card grades.

- Grades on individual summative assessments (e.g., tests and projects) are the “ingredients” that go together to make up the report card grade. If they do not reflect achievement, the report card grade cannot, either.
- Use decision rules that give intended weights and emphases to individual assessments to arrive at a final grade for the report card. Only then will the report card grade mean “achievement of what I was trying to learn this report period” in this subject or on this standard.




6 Strategies For Grading Individual Assessments

- 1) Communicate clear learning targets. Make sure students clearly understand the learning targets and the criteria on which they will be assessed.
- 2) Make sure individual assessments are high-quality.
- 3) Use formative assessment during learning and before grading.
- 4) Inform students about graded assessments.
- 5) Grade achievement, and handle behavioral issues behaviorally.
- 6) Assess and grade individual achievements.



Strategies To Use **Before** Work Begins, When An Assignment Is Introduced

- 1) Ask students to pose clarifying questions.
- 2) Ask students to restate the rubric in their own words.
- 3) Have students sort examples of work into high, medium, and low groups and explain their reasoning.
- 4) Cocreate rubrics with students.




Strategies To Use **After** Work, As Learning Is Happening

- 1) Have students match their own peers' work to the rubrics and explain their reasoning.
- 2) Have students use highlighters to match performance descriptions to elements in their work.
- 3) Use rubrics to help students keep track of their own work.



Examples Of Communicating Clearly About Grades And Grading

- 1) At the beginning of the school year, established a learning climate in your classroom where mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn, not errors to be called out and judged. Help students understand what learning targets and criteria for success are and how they can use them to learn.
- 2) Once you are sure your students understand the learning environment in your classroom, let students know about your classroom grading policies and how they fit with the school or district's grading policy. Have a written policy that includes student input as appropriate.
- 3) Communicate with both the students and parents throughout the year by giving feedback for formative assessments and grades for classroom summative assessments.
- 4) At report card time, provide the same information as from the beginning of the year. If your report card form is not clear about the meaning of a grade or about other symbols (e.g. from a Work Habits scale), clarify what these grades and marks mean.



If I don't grade them, how should I handle issues like student behavior and effort?

Use other management strategies (not grading) to handle behavior and work habits.

- Issues related to an assignment's direction (e.g., using a cover sheet, putting name and date on the work) are usually best handled with student checklists, self-assessments, and individual teacher feedback. They should not form part of the assignment's grade.
- Issues regarding work habits (e.g., not trying very hard, turning in work late) are usually best handled with individual feedback, beginning with finding out why the student isn't trying. They should not form part of the assignment's grade.
- Issues of classroom conduct (e.g., yelling out in class) are usually best handled with individual feedback and sometimes student contracts or behavior management plans. They should not form part of a grade.



Effectively Assessing Students Using Rubrics



A Growth Mindset

Using Rubrics to Meet Your Learning Targets



What Are Rubrics?

“

A rubric is a coherent set of criteria for students' work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality on the criteria.


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Source: Brookhart, 2013, p.4





What are Rubrics Good for?

- Assessing complex performances
 - Helping students assess their own work
 - Helping teachers give feedback targeted to learning criteria
- 



Why are Rubrics Important?

Rubrics are an important tool in the quest to help students learn *how to learn*. Both students and teachers can use them for

- Feedback during learning.
- Grading.

If you only use rubrics for grading, you miss the important dual-purpose aspect of rubrics and do not get all the benefits rubrics have to offer.

Rubrics encode the criteria for good work and descriptions of what that work looks like into a format students can use. Research suggests this is the reason they help boost student learning.

Understanding the criteria is what's important – rubrics are just a convenient and conventional way to present them to students in a handy and practical format.

How Do Rubrics Differ From Other Assessment Tools?

Performance level descriptions are what separate rubrics from other assessment tools.

- ▶ A *checklist* is a set of criteria that are judged present/absent or yes/no/
- ▶ Checklists do not have performance level descriptions.
- ▶ Checklists are especially useful for assessing whether students have followed directions for an assignment (e.g., has a title page, has a table of contents) or for simple performance assessments (e.g., my sentence starts with a capital letter, ends with a period).
- ▶ A *rating scale* is a set of criteria that are assessed by a scale, typically an evaluative scale (e.g., Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor) or a frequency scale (e.g., Always, Often, Sometimes, Never).
- ▶ Rating scales have criteria but no performance level description and do not describe why, for example, work is “good.”
- ▶ Evaluative rating scales are not very useful in the classroom. Frequently scales are useful for behavior and effort ratings (e.g., Comes to class prepared: Always, Often, Sometime, Never).

Types of Rubrics

1	2	3	4
Analytic, general rubrics treat each criterion separately and can be applied to many tasks in the same domain.	Analytic, task-specific rubrics treat each criterion separately and can only be applied to one task.	Holistic, general rubrics treat all criteria simultaneously and can be applied to many tasks in the same domain.	Holistic, task-specific rubrics treat all criteria simultaneously and can only be applied to one task.
When to use: With students for formative assessment and grading.	When to use: Sometimes used for grading, but are generally not recommended.	When to use: For assessment of simple skills	When to use: In grading situations where students will not get feedback or have opportunities to improve.

What does an Effective Rubric Look Like?

Effective rubrics start with *criteria* that articulate *what you and your students should look for* to provide evidence of *learning*. Based on a good, brief, usable list of criteria, effective rubrics provide descriptions of student performance at all levels so that students and teachers can place the work – the evidence of student learning – along the continuum.



Example Rubric Template

As seen in this chart, analytical rubrics are often constructed with the criteria defining the rows and the levels defining the columns. Sometimes the chart is reversed with the criteria defining columns and the levels defining rows, or there is no chart and each criterion is presented with its performance level descriptions listed underneath.

	Advanced	Proficient	Novice	Beginner
Sample Criterion	Description of work at an advanced level on the sample criterion.	Description of work at a proficient level on the sample criterion.	Description of work at a novice level on the sample criterion.	Description of work at a beginning level on the sample criterion.

How Can I Use Rubrics With My Students?

The great things about rubrics is that they can be used to link formative and summative assessment, helping students become involved in their own assessment. Of course, this only works if the criteria are about learning and not the requirements of an assignment.

Using the student-involvement strategies with rubrics that are simply assignment directions in a chart, or that count quantities (e.g., fewer than three errors, at least two pictures) instead of describing qualities (e.g., readable sentences, relevant illustrations) will backfire! It encourages a *compliance* approach to an assignment rather than a *learning-center* approach.



FAQ



Q. Do I need a rubric for everything my students do?

A. No. Use rubrics for assessing student performance, especially in complex assignments and projects, and for skills that are developed over time (like writing).



Giving Students Effective Feedback



What is feedback?

Feedback is information about a student's learning that helps the student take the next steps in the learning process.

This guide covers teacher feedback to students as part of the formative learning cycle in the classroom. *Elaborated feedback* means feedback that connects evidence in students' work with students' current thinking and understanding and uses those inferences to suggest next steps in learning.

Questions

The most effective learning happens when students are aiming for some understanding or skill, usually called a learning target, and are participating in a formative learning process based on three questions:

- 1) Where am I going?
- 2) Where am I now?
- 3) Where to next?



You might think that feedback just covers that second question—helping students understand the quality of their work and their learning at a point in time. In reality, effective feedback helps students with all three questions by helping students

- See exactly what it is they are trying to learn.
- Understand where they are currently.
- See what their next step in learning should be and get the information they need to take that step.


Why is feedback important?

Feedback is the most important or nearly the most important variable affecting the amount and quality of student learning.




Suggestions For Ensuring That Feedback Results In Learning For Both Teachers And Students





To help teachers learn about student thinking by giving feedback on student work

- Give feedback on assignments where students had to use thinking process, not just recall information.
- Try to infer the understandings (even if they are partial or mistaken) and thought process students must have used in order to produce the work they did.
- Relate these understandings about student thinking to the learning goals they are trying to achieve, and identify the *next change in thinking* that needs to happen for them to get there.
- Make this change in thinking the centerpiece of your feedback comments or next instructional moves for that student.



To help students learn from feedback on their work

- Communicate the learning goal(s) and success criteria before students begin work, and revisit them often during the work.
- Make sure the feedback you give refers to these learning goals and criteria.
- Provide opportunities for students to process feedback comments they receive by
 - Giving students opportunities to ask questions about the feedback.
 - Giving students opportunities to explain to you or a peer what their feedback means and what they will do about it.
- Give students an opportunity to use the feedback to improve.



Closure to Module #5

1. Final reflections
2. Individual implementation plans
3. School-wide plans