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Grading Strategies for the College Classroom: A collection of articles for faculty

Maryellen Weimer Ph.D.

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Grading Strategies for the College Classroom provides insights into managing the supremely complicated task of assigning a simple letter to a semester's work. It's a must-read for any faculty member seeking to understand how to use assessment not just to measure performance but also to enhance it, and it delivers some of the most current, innovative ideas for meeting that challenge. It presents new:

- Thinking about what grades should measure
- Ideas for developing robust assessment tools
- Strategies for encouraging students to pursue knowledge instead of grades
- Ways to ensure that assessments gauge performance and inspire effort

A collection of more than 30 articles written by a score of highly accomplished college classroom veterans, *Grading Strategies for the College Classroom* was edited by Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D., author, editor of *The Teaching Professor* newsletter, and award-winning professor emerita of teaching and learning at Penn State Berks.

The book's articles, first published in *The Teaching Professor,* address four critical aspects of the assessment process: grading exams, assessing papers, gauging participation, and engaging students in meaningful conversations about grades.

Grading Exams

The authors present creative solutions for the challenges of grading exams. Articles cover:

- Alternatives to final exams, including reflective exercises and concept-mapping projects
- Research showing why cumulative exams may be a better teaching tool than unit exams
- How-tos for designing, administering, and managing security concerns for online exams
- Policies that reduce test anxiety and mitigate morale problems

Grading Papers

This material is equally innovative when it comes to the challenges of assigning and assessing papers. Articles present a wealth of high-impact ideas, including:

- A unique carrot-and-stick method to encourage students to create drafts of papers
- Ten practical tips for successfully managing the paper-grading burden
- A manageable process-driven approach to grading that can be a lifesaver, particularly for new faculty
- A critical reexamination of the value of rubrics in grading papers
- Best and worst practices in grading papers

Classroom Participation

Chapter three focuses on a perennial ambiguous grading area, classroom participation, providing insight into how student perceptions of participation can differ from those of faculty and how to reconcile the two. The

authors share strategies for:

- Creating a participation rubric
- Helping students appreciate the difference between mere attendance and participation
- Assessing and grading online participation
- Reconciling rubrics with student self-assessments

Talking with Students about Grades

The book's final section addresses the difficult subject of managing expectations and conversations about students' grades. This process begins on the first day of class and continues past the final exam. Topics include how to:

- Answer the question "What will we be graded on?"
- Handle the "I deserve a better grade on this" conversation
- Involve students in determining assignment weights and how this impacts performance
- Deal with students' growing sense of entitlement

The learning "story" that takes place over the course of a semester is rich, complex, and unique to each student. The details of how an individual progresses (or does not) over the term, what skills are developed, and what knowledge is retained could fill a book.

And yet in the end, professors are asked to tell the story not in a book, on a page, over a paragraph, or even in a sentence, but in a single letter. Small wonder grading is such a persistent challenge for both new and veteran faculty.

The foreword is by Barbara E. Walvoord, Ph.D., professor emerita of the University of Notre Dame and author of several classic books on higher ed assessment and grading, including *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College.*

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