PIE Coffee Hour & Teaching Workshop

Strategies for Grading: Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Equality

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# Description

Grading is a major responsibility for most TAs. Fair, effective grading can help and motivate students to learn. However, grading can also be stressful and time-consuming for TAs. You might spend tons of time grading, but not sure if it is effective. You might worry that your grading scheme is not perfect. You might be struggling to decide if you have deducted too many points...This workshop addresses these issues by providing some strategies on how to grade with efficiency, effectiveness and equality. The strategies mostly come from our PIE Associates, who are experienced TAs from various academic backgrounds. You can contribute to this workshop, too.

# Writing Clear, Well-Aligned Assessments

**Author**: Caity Kelly

Creating an assessment that is strongly aligned with your course objectives and accompanied by clear, thorough instructions is a key component of efficient, objective grading. When in doubt--write instructions and bold/highlight key concepts. Leave space for students to ask questions about the assessment and, if possible, ask a colleague to proof-read your instructions for clarity. Assessments should directly measure your learning objectives.

**Grading in a timely fashion**

**Author**: Farrah Hersh

As teaching assistants,

we are pulled in many different directions, from our own assignments and coursework to our students and other university obligations. I have found that doing a little bit of grading each day rather than saving it all for one day helps me engage with student writing and the feedback I provide to them. By setting aside an hour or so per day over the course of a weekend, week, or two weeks, teachers tend to deliver more concise and helpful notes rather than rushing through the grading process. Making time to grade will benefit you and your students equally.

# Anonymous Grading, or Equitable Grading?

**Author**: TehQuin Forbes

Racial and gender bias, both implicit and explicit, explains much of the grading disparities we see in higher education. To combat these biases, Canvas installed an anonymous grading feature for instructors to try reducing bias in their assessment of student work. You can learn [how to hide students’ names in SpeedGrader](https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Instructor-Guide/How-do-I-hide-student-names-in-SpeedGrader/ta-p/768) online.

# Pick the right time and place when you are ready to grade

**Author**: Melanie Medina

Having a clear mindset is important to grade efficiently and decrease any potential biases. So the first you should do is pick the optimal time and place to grade.

* Identify a time when you can grade and stick to it. Think of a time when you are most productive and when your mind is clear.
* Identify a place for your grading. You would want a place with little distractions so you can get into a state of flow. This can be anywhere you can be alone and focus.

# Take notes as you grade

**Author:** Lauren Willson

The best tip I have for anyone when grading is to take notes as you go, as this is one of the best ways to ensure consistency as you work through your stack of grades. I generally write a spreadsheet as I grade major assignments and jot down any quick information next to each student submission that will help me calibrate my grading standards and ensure I’m applying the same standard to all submissions. This makes it much easier when I go to review the final grades to know why two submissions who made different mistakes received the same grade. Some things I recommend jotting down as you go:

* Take note of “problem cases” so you can return to them later. This would be things like submissions where you aren’t sure how to grade them early on in your stack before you’ve established a proper baseline for grading. You can also take note of submissions you want your instructor of record to review.
* Note how you are treating commonly-seen mistakes. This will allow you to ensure that all students who make the same mistake are receiving the same deduction. Further, this makes it very easy to create a list of commonly-seen mistakes to provide to your instructor of record for your students.

Effectively Using the “Sandwich Method” to Give Feedback

**Author:** Emily Snowden

The “sandwich method” has been popularized as an accessible way to give students feedback in a digestible way. By surrounding a criticism with positive commentary, the sandwich method is thought to help “cushion the blow” of the criticism. Thus, many suggest a format of “compliment-criticism-compliment” when giving feedback. However, when oversimplified in this way, the criticism becomes the main content of the feedback, and the importance of the positive comments get lost. This is problematic as it’s also just as important for students to receive positive feedback so they can have help in recognizing their strengths and not just their weaknesses.

Tips:

*Approach to content:* Ground the content of your feedback in your rubric. You can also borrow language from your Canvas descriptions and/or your Syllabus. However, engage with what the expectations you gave them were and borrow your own language to tell them how they did on the assignment.

*Implementation:* While still using the positive-negative-positive format to organize the content of the feedback, we can think about instead using strength-opportunity for growth-summary. Here’s how we can break down this approach:

*[Student name],*

*+Strength (where were the least amount of points deducted and why?)*

*-Opportunity for growth (where were the most amount of points deducted and how could they improve?)*

*+Summary (revisit ideas from your feedback and give them direction looking ahead)*

So, just like a sandwich, there is a format to this. It’s predictable and accessible, but doesn’t oversimplify it and helps us make sure we still give students holistic, dynamic pieces of feedback.

# Be Clear about Point Deduction

**Author**: Fang Liang

Points for an assignment or a test are very important for students, and therefore we should try our best to ensure fair grading (and avoid student’s complaints). When you think point deduction is necessary, the first thing is to find the solid basis for doing so. That means you follow the grading rubric closely. Second, when you deduct any points, you must state clearly why you deducted those points in the feedback. If necessary, you might want to take notes to remind yourself why there is a major point deduction. Most importantly, whenever you can, provide the students with clear directions as to how they can improve.