

# Grading

## The Purposes and Limitations of Grading

- It is important to recognize how limited grades are in showing true learning. Don't focus more on grades than you do on actual learning.
- Emphasize to students the importance of evaluating their own work and learning from their mistakes. This will very likely mean not grading some assignments at all, instead focusing your time and energy on creating learning opportunities out of the students' mistakes.
- Think about the purposes of tests and quizzes. What are they *for*? We often default to giving tests because "It's time to give a test" or "I'd better get at least one more test grade before the end of the quarter." There may be times when these statements are valid, but perhaps the better thought would be "We are at a point in the study when it would be helpful to measure how much students have learned."
- Purposes of grading:
  - Shows a student's progress (or lack thereof): An objective measure is needed to confirm learning. Early detection of gaps will make intervention easier.
  - Reveals weak teaching areas: Grading reveals concept areas where overall student understanding is low, signalling the need for reteaching.
  - Provides feedback for parents: Grades are a way to inform parents of their child's academic performance.
- Grades must tell the truth. They are like a fuel-gage on a car—only helpful if actually accurate.
  - Make sure grades are explainable. There should be logic and reason behind a grade, and it should reflect reality.
  - Pre-establish standards. Beware of changing the metrics of what you are grading for as you go. Rubrics are helpful in this. Avoid adjusting grades post-grading.
  - Give partial credit when applicable. This is particularly true in math, where being able to follow a process is part of what students were supposed to learn.
  - Ensure you are basing the grade off the actual subject content. For example, taking off points for grammar and spelling on a history test is not giving an accurate grade of the student's knowledge of history.

## Formative Versus Summative Assessment

- Formative assessment is assessment *for* learning. It's a teacher checking for understanding of what a student has mastered/hasn't mastered and giving nearly instant feedback so the student can correct gaps in their understanding.
- Summative assessment is assessment *of* learning. It's a broad assessment of days or weeks of student learning.
- Examples of practical formative assessments:

- Traffic lights—the teacher issues each child three craft sticks or stop signs: one red, one yellow, and one green. The student holds up the appropriate stick when asked to do so to represent his current level of understanding. Red implies that the child completely lacks understanding of the concept. Yellow means that he has partial understanding but would not be able to explain the concept to someone else. Green shows that he both understands the concept and could explain it to someone else. This could be tweaked for older students by having them label sections of their papers with the color that corresponds to their understanding.
- Teacher chart—the teacher creates a chart for the entire class, labeling columns with dates and rows with student names. Throughout the time period assigned to learning a particular objective, the teacher observes each student briefly for the same goal, such as participating in class discussions or reading fluently. The teacher briefly notes the student’s performance and can track their progress.
- Entrance slips—the teacher gives students a slip of paper at the beginning of class. It may ask a question from the day before, ask a preview question of the current day’s topic, or provide them with a chance to give feedback.
- Exit tickets—the teacher gives students a question to respond to or a problem to solve related to what was taught in class that day. This allows the teacher to quickly check for understanding and can inform the next day’s lesson.
- Assessment of objectives—go over the list of objectives for the lesson or the chapter and read them one by one to students. Have them rate their understanding from one to ten or give a thumbs up, thumbs in the middle, or thumbs down rating.

### How to Approach Difficult-to-Grade Subjects

- Rubrics are the teacher’s best friend for efficient and fair marking, as well as a wonderful tool to help improve student learning.
  - Rubrics are ideal for subjective assignments or performance-based tasks.
  - Rubrics provide transparency and consistency for students and parents (e.g. “This is a C because...”)
  - Rubrics enable quick, specific, and effective feedback without requiring hours of the teacher’s time.
- A guide to creating and using rubrics: [Grading with Rubrics in the English Classroom - The Dock for Learning](#)
- A method for grading penmanship or art: stack-sort by quality (best to worst), then assign letter grades in an appropriately descending fashion.
- A document with helpful tips and methods for grading various subjective subjects: [Grading Difficult Subjects - The Dock for Learning](#)

## Sources

- The Grading Mountain by Rosalie Beiler: [The Grading Mountain - The Dock for Learning](#)

- A Test Is to Give by Chris Brode: [A Hole Is to Dig. A Test Is to...Give? - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Methods of Evaluation by Derek Overholt: [Methods of Evaluation - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Conquering Subjectivity in Assessments and Embracing the Rubric by Sharon Martin: [Conquering Subjectivity in Assessments and Embracing the Rubric \(Sharon Martin\) - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Grading Processes and Record-Keeping Part I by Jonathan Erb: [Grading Processes and Record Keeping, Part I - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Quick and Easy Formative Assessment by Karen Birt: [Quick and Easy Formative Assessment - The Dock for Learning](#)
- More Than a Grade: Assessment as Teaching Tool by Brian Martin: [More Than a Grade: Assessment as a Teaching Tool - The Dock for Learning](#)