

Making Assignments Worth Grading

Source: Effective Grading: A Tool for Teaching and Learning (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998, Jossey-Bas)

1. What do you want your students learn?

Develop your student learning outcomes based on what is essential for students to learn in your class. In addition to your own specific goals for the course, you also need to consider whether the course is expected to provide students the opportunity to achieve student learning outcomes associated with the major or the general education program.

2. What assignments and tests measure what you value most?

Is there a good fit between the learning you want students to gain and the tests and assignments that you give? For example, if what you value most is analysis, synthesis and critical thinking, don't use tests and assignments that primarily focus on student's grasp of basic content.

- a. Choose assignments that are likely to elicit from your students the kind of learning that you want to measure.
- b. Choose assignments that are interesting and challenging to your students.
- c. Use peer collaboration.

3. Is your course outline oriented toward the topics you want to cover or the learning you want your students to gain?

Construct your course outline around your assignments and tests based on what students need to know or be able to do if they are going to do well

4. Have you checked your tests and assignments for fit and feasibility?

Fit: Do my tests and assignments fit the kind of learning I most want?

Feasibility: Is the workload I am planning for myself and my students reasonable, strategically placed and sustainable?

5. Can you collaborate with your students to set and achieve learning goals?

Ask students on the first day what they think the purpose of the class is and what they want to learn from it. Discuss the relationship between their goals and your class goals and how the assignments and tests relate to the student learning outcomes for the course.

6. Are your assignment and test instructions clear to students?

Students will complete the assignment that they think you wanted rather than the one you had in mind but did not clearly describe.

- a. What is the main point and purpose of the assignment or test?
- b. If they should target their work toward a specific audience, who is that audience - the instructor, an elementary student, a client?
- c. What pattern and procedures do you expect them to follow? Is there a specific format or approach you expect them to use?

- d. What are the standards and criteria on which their performance will be evaluated on? Having clear standards and criteria is important for the following reasons:
- Shows what you want the students to learn
 - Demonstrates to the student what your performance expectations are
 - Increases student engagement in their own learning
 - Fosters the life-long learning skill of self-assessment
 - Helps students provide peers with constructive feedback on drafts
 - Increases consistency and fairness in the grading process
 - Saves instructor time during the grading process and in having to respond to student questions about how they ended up with the grade that they were given
 - Identifies relationship between discipline information and process
 - Helps to connect tests and assignments to student learning outcomes and the assessment process

8. Can your assignments and tests also be used for assessing student learning outcomes associated with the major or the general education program?

The course-embedded assessment approach attempts to increase efficiency of the overall assessment process by making use of course-level exams and assignments that can provide, or can be re-designed to provide, evidence of group level achievement of student learning outcomes associated with an academic major or the general education program. Since it is not the purpose of this approach to second guess grades assigned by an instructor, copies of student work that are not marked with instructor comments and grades are typically used. Student names are also typically removed.