



## Grading Tips

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### **1. When you distribute the assignment, spend time parsing it with the students and clarifying it.**

Ask them to identify how many parts there are and to determine which ones should be addressed more fully than others need to be. Make sure they understand the rhetorical terms you might use (such as analysis vs. summary). If possible, show them a redacted student paper that illustrates a response to the question that could have been better. Have them analyze why the paper deserved a low grade.

**2. Guide Students' Attention:** You *could* tell students absolutely everything they are doing wrong in their essays, but it would be overwhelming for them and time consuming for you.

- Identify the one to three most important issues they need to focus on; this helps them prioritize their efforts and you will write less.

**3. Ask the Students to Guide *Your* Attention:** When students submit their papers, ask them to identify on a cover sheet the specific things they would like you to address in your feedback. The cover sheet can also include a checklist where the students verify that they have proofread their paper before submitting it; they have used the correct citation format; and have addressed the key issues they received in your previous feedback to them. This activity will help reduce the amount of feedback on aspects that they should have taken care of themselves, is more likely to get them to actually read and attend to prior feedback, and holds them accountable to their word.

**4. Avoid Excessive Editing:** Students struggle with writing, and essays can be riddled with spelling, grammar or punctuation errors. You may want them to understand the errors they are making, but you do not want to copy edit a five page essay.

- Select one paragraph to edit and note that they should get help with these issues from the Writing Center (they have drop-in writing consultations and “individual writing conferences” by appointment, both free).
- Select one example of a recurring error to explain and correct, identify other places where that error occurs in the essay. (These are some of the matters to which they can attest to having addressed when they submit the cover sheet suggested above.)

**3. Identify Common Issues:** You often find patterns of problems as you grade. For example, students may share common misunderstandings of a concept.

- Give students a comment key to provide a substantial explanation without writing the same thing repeatedly. Each comment has a number; if they have that number on their paper they can match it to the right comment. The comment can be even more helpful if it also includes a strategy students might use to address the issues.



**4. Pace Yourself:** Set a manageable goal that you work at consistently. For example, if you have 80 papers, you might set yourself a goal of eight papers every day, or ~15 papers on days you are least busy and six hours every other day.

**5. Use a Rubric:** rubrics help you stay consistent and focused on specific aspects of an assignment while reducing the time that you might spend agonizing over what grade to give a paper. It can also help you decide which comments are most important to make at the end of the paper. It's useful to provide the rubric to students when giving the prompt. After all, if they don't know what you're looking for, they will have a harder time providing it. Additionally, you can have students use the rubric for self-assessment or peer-assessment.

**6. Pick Your Battles:** Frequently, students do review papers that they turn in at the end of the quarter. Therefore, *final* papers are not the time to provide them with extensive feedback.

- Offer students the option of asking for more feedback if they intend to pick up their paper, e.g., you have them write "comments, please" on their paper.

**7. "Post-it" first, then write it:** Often, the first few grades are either much higher or much lower than the rest because it takes some time before you standardize your expectations.

- Give tentative grades for the first 5-10 papers, final grades later on the paper itself.

**8. Clarify a re-grade policy on syllabus:** Develop a policy with the professor and suggest some policies.

- For example, require students to submit in writing why they deserve a different grade (no email).
- Give students a limited time frame during which they must submit the written request for a grade review.

**9. Build consensus with the instructor and TAs:** Make sure everyone is on the same page so grades are fair and consistent

- Work together to build a rubric considering (a) what the learning outcomes of the assignment are and (b) what grades will be based on.
- Have everyone grade the same 5 papers using the same rubric, discuss discrepancies and come to agreement. Adjust your own grading to the instructor's.

**10. Feedback that's concrete and gives options:** "Feedback without strategies for improvement is just complaining" (D. Gallow).

- Offer examples of what you mean, e.g., "I'm not sure if this means X or Y"; state how they are being unclear, since what they've written was probably clear to them. Explain where the writing is ambiguous and therefore could be interpreted as X or Y.
- Offer students strategies or options for improvement. If you can't come up with a strategy for a student, how can he or she be expected to do so?



**11. Leave positive feedback:** It can sometimes feel natural to only mark off problems in the essay, but it's important to note all of the positives as well. Both sides of the feedback are useful to students.

**12. Grade blind:** To ensure fairness as well as to protect yourself from charges of bias, grade student work blind whenever possible.

- Have students write their student ID numbers instead of their names.
- Have students write their names at the end of the paper, not the beginning.
- Have students attach a cover page with their name. Before grading, go through the stack of papers and place the cover page at the end.
- Turn on the "blind grading" option on Canvas and Turnitin.com.