

Barton Clark's Educational philosophy on grading

One may ask, what is the purpose of grading?

But first we should ask, what is the purpose of school?

- To learn content? To learn skills?
- To build self-confidence? To develop creative ideas?
- To build disciplined work habits? To develop quality writing skills?
- To prepare students for the rigors and expectations of life (including but not limited to attending university)

(note: all of these are lifted directly from **The Common (college) Application** as "criteria of evaluation" for teachers to fill out when students ask us to write them letters of recommendation).

Which leads us to the question: should our grading systems reflect these goals?

In Barton Clark's class, the grade a student receives is a composite of factors including content knowledge, skill development, degrees of improvement.. and Mr. Clark's *professional judgment* (gasp!) on how students are doing (when the data set is incomplete for some reason such as illness, student -IEPs, etc.) The progress/reports that I sent out then serve two purposes.. 1.. to show students the 'unfiltered' data that I'm looking at **AND**.. 2. *Acts as a source of input to expand the discussion on the other purposes of school.*

At the end of the day, the grade entered into 'the system' (in Barton Clark's class) will reflect content knowledge, skill development, evidence of continual improvement in academic and emotional development **and** general "readiness" for the students next step in life (referring to facets of student development described at the top).

In my class, if a student earns an A. I'm communicating two things (to them, their parents, and colleges)

1. The students has mastered the content and skills required per the content area *and*
2. The student has the skills to allow them to succeed in their next "life" step, regardless of what that step is (school, job, training, etc.)

Below is an example of Clark's "hybridized standards based grading system". (including factors beyond simple content knowledge) with rational for each component below.

Completed the assignment? (<i>just the minimum or perhaps something more?</i>)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Clear progression of ideas? (<i>can a reader easily and clearly follow what you did and why?</i>)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Creativity in writing, layout and use of illustrations? (<i>how well do you capture the readers interest?</i>)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Overall professional layout and construction (<i>i.e. overall craftsmanship of product</i>)	5	4	3	2	1	0

5 = superior. Teacher is impressed
4 = "good job". (you took 3rd in the race).

3 = you understood the directions and made a minimum effort to comply.

2 -1 = your effort is less than satisfactory

0 = item is absent altogether.

Note overall grade is based on "all 4s" equaling 88% = B+. (i.e., 16/18 = 88% = B+)

Rational for this, five point scoring system:

The first item: Completed the assignment; invites the student to consider both "the minimum" required to complete the assignment, but also to reflect on how they might take it to the next level (add components which are related but which were not directly stated as requirements, for example). This helps build "intellectual promise", "initiative", and "motivation" (all items we must evaluate students on while filling out college recommendations) to do more. The score I give in this category includes all of those dimensions.

The second item: Clear progression of ideas; is based on the assumption that it is not enough to be able to “get the answer” but it is also important to be able to communicate that train of thought effectively. (quality of writing, productive discussion, self-confidence” (additional items we must evaluate students on while filling out college recommendations).. are all domains of growth reflected on by this category.

The Third item: Creativity in writing, layout, use of illustrations, etc; invites the student to develop their.. Creativity in communicating effectively such as, attracting an audience, standing out , and hopefully ‘getting noticed’ when circumstance require it (such as writing reports for businesses, writing college essays, etc.) (note: a bored reader won’t read your paper, whether it’s a grant proposal, an email requesting a meeting, or a resume describing your strengths).

The fourth item: Overall professional layout and construction; Reminds the student that they should always take pride in their workmanship and take seriously, the question of: does it matter what I hand in? (What does handing in that torn-up, twice erased mess which is impossible to read, say to the teacher about me?). (this develops disciplined habits, faculty respect, concern for others, and self confidence which, once again are all areas in which colleges ask teachers to reflect on when writing letters of recommendation) .

Additional logic worth noting:

The scored is based on a student getting “all fours”.. = B+.. (ie., “pretty good” across the board, but nothing exceptional.. i.e., not A work.

In my opinion, an A grade connotes “superior” knowledge, workmanship and skills. Therefor, and A grade requires that a student be “superior” in at least one dimension, but that dimension isn’t limited to strictly superior mastery of content. Scoring a Five in any of the four categories places you in the low A range.

Additional frequently asked question: Why does the grade in the school database differ from the grade on the progress report? (i.e., sometimes higher than what the progress report suggests)

In Barton Clark’s class, the basic formula for grading is the following:

- Quizzes and tests = 40% of the overall grade
- Labs and projects = 40%
- Classwork and homework = 20% of the grade.

With the grade break down as follows:

- A = 100% - 90%.
- B = 89.9% -75%
- C = 74.9 % -60%
- D = 59% - 45%
- F = 44.9% - 35%
- Super F = 34%-25%
- (Inc) = less than 25%. ..

But.. Mr. Clark is not “stuck” to this formula. i.e., there are many situations in which Mr. Clark may raise the student’s grade ABOVE what the formula “calculates” as “the grade”. See examples below.

Example 1: a student doing very well on tests and labs, but failing to do homework. (Homework is simply the measure of engagement, not the measure of learning or productivity). In this case, I’ll more heavily weight the grade towards the test and lab scores.

Example 2: A student struggles at first and begins the semester with low test and/or lab scores. As they begin to appreciate and understand what I’m looking for and scores improve, I will more heavily weight their grade towards the end of the semester.

Additional logic worth noting:

I collect enormous amounts of data across multiple categories, which help the student develop a better understanding of how work and study habits translate into meaningful learning, usually on the order of 50 data points per semester.

And as stated previously, I use my “grading formula” as a “starting point” for discussion, and acknowledge that no one systems is perfect.. so I will “look for reasons to raise a student’s grade above formula (sometimes dropping low test scores or overlooking low homework scores if they have IEPs.. or came into class late....basically using my “professional judgement” to decide if I should “adjust the grade” (up only) on a per-student/circumstance basis.

In practice, in my class, students learn to make an effort across all categories of evaluation and more importantly, are constantly MOTIVATED to improve across all domains (content knowledge, writing skills, leadership, integrity, pride in workmanship, etc.). It happens on a regular basis that students return from their first year in college to tell me how my class was ‘the most important class” they had with regard to actually preparing them for succeeding at the university level of expectations they find themselves in.

Please feel free to contact Mr. Clark directly with questions, comments or suggestions.

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