



HOW TO GRADE FOR LEARNING

One very significant positive aspect of Culp and Malone's approach is that it overcomes a problem that is seen frequently in the marking of cooperative learning—the rationing of success. They overcome the problem by giving a mark of 95% to each student in a group of four whose average contribution is 21% or greater. However, if a percentage contribution of 21% or higher is considered to be exemplary performance, the mark should be 100% for two reasons: (1) students are not arbitrarily penalized, and (2) the maximum score should always be attainable. To paraphrase Stiggins (1993), any student who hits the goal should get the highest possible mark.

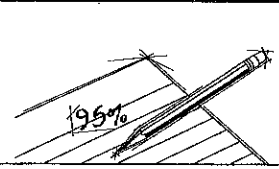
Any student who hits the goal should get the highest possible mark.

Another very appropriate approach suggested by Burke (1999) is shown in Figure 3.4. The template provides a way for ensuring that, as the name of the strategy—cooperative *learning*—implies, the focus of the cooperative phase is on learning which is followed by individual assessment. Benevino and Snodgrass (1998) support this approach with a number of suggestions about how individual accountability can be ensured: “teacher monitoring of (cooperative) activity work; and essay response based on questions formulated during the activity; a class discussion of the questions and responses generated; and a (test) on the content” (146).

In conclusion, note that “a carefully constructed cooperative environment that offers challenging learning tasks, that allows students to make key decisions about how they perform, and that emphasizes the value (and skills) of helping each other to learn” (Kohn 1991, 86) is far more important than coming up with the perfect way to mark. The various aspects of cooperative learning (see Figure 3.3) can then be included in grades or learning skills depending on whether they are part of the standards or not. This is a difficult aspect of marking and grading. The principle to keep in mind is to emphasize individual achievement within the cooperative learning setting.

What Should Not Be in Grades?

Effort, participation, attitude, and other personal and social characteristics need to be reported separately from achievement. Figure 3.5 shows a very inappropriate grading plan for a performance subject.



Creating Performance Tasks

Create a meaningful performance task for your subject area.

Subject Area: Health Grade Level: 8th Grade

Task Description: As part of the school's Health Fair Week, students will develop a plan for eliminating all smoking areas from local businesses. The project will include: 1) a presentation; 2) a brochure; 3) a letter to the community newspaper; 4) a 5-minute video "selling" the students' ideas to the business owners.

Direct Instruction for Whole Class: The whole class will be involved in the following learning experiences:

- Guest lecture from the school nurse on the effects of secondhand smoke
- Training in computer graphic design
- Lectures and discussions on the health risks related to smoking

Group Work: Students may select their group.

Group One

Research facts and statistics about effects of smoking.

Group Two

Prepare charts and graphs on health risks of smoking in a brochure.

Group Three

Summarize the key research points in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.

Group Four

Prepare a five-minute video to present to business owners.

Individual Work: In addition to the group project, each student will complete the following individual assignments:

- 1) A poster that integrates the most essential facts, statistics, quotes, and visuals to argue for a smoking ban in all public businesses in the area; 2) a portfolio that contains selected assignments from the unit as well as student reflections on each artifact.

Methods of Assessment

- Teacher-made test on the health risks of smoking
- Rubrics to assess each of the four group projects
- Checklist to assess criteria for poster and portfolios

Figure 3.4

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Sample Grading Inventory

In this extract from an actual high school grading inventory for a performance subject, the asterisked items should NOT be included in grades.

	<u>% of grade</u>
*Daily activities	40%
Major projects and performances	30%
Journals (reflections on projects and performances)	10%
*Attendance and punctuality	20%

<u>Attendance Scale</u>	<u>Late (Tardiness) Scale</u>
20 marks—perfect attendance	Subtract 1/2 mark—first tardy
16 marks—3 absences	Subtract 1/2 mark—second tardy
12 marks—4 absences	Subtract 1 mark—tardies thereafter
8 marks—5 absences	
4 marks—6 absences	
0 marks—7 absences	

Figure 3.5

REFLECTING ON . . . GRADING PLANS

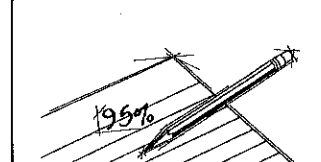
Consider the effects of the grading plan shown in Figure 3.5 on the following scenarios, in which a block schedule with 70 classes can be assumed:

Scenario 1—a student who missed 10% of the classes would be able to receive a grade of no more than 80%, even if he or she got perfect marks in all other aspects of the course.

Scenario 2—a student who missed 7% of the classes and who was late for 10% of the classes would be able to receive a maximum grade of 82%.

Are these fair results?

- ▶ Does this inventory produce grades with clear meaning?
- ▶ Does a procedure like this promote attendance and punctuality?
- ▶ Does a procedure like this honor learning?



Effort

Hard work (effort), frequent responses to teacher questions, intense involvement in class activities (participation), and a positive, encouraging, friendly, and happy demeanor (attitude) are all highly valued attributes. However, they should not be included directly in grades, because they are very difficult to define and even more difficult to measure.

Stiggins (1997) provided a detailed analysis of the arguments for and against including these factors in grades. With regard to effort, he said that definitions of trying hard vary greatly from teacher to teacher, and so, if effort is included in the grade, “we add noise into the grade interpretation process” (418). *Noise* means “static, not clear meaningful signals” (413). He also noted that “students can manipulate their apparent level of effort to mislead us” (418).

Participation

Stiggins (1997) suggested that participation is often a personality issue—some students are naturally more assertive while others are naturally quieter. This is often related to gender and/or ethnicity, and so we run the risk of these biases if we include effort and participation in grades. Another problem is that “factoring effort into the grade may send the wrong message to students. In real life just trying hard to do a good job is virtually never enough. If we don’t deliver relevant, practical results, we will not be deemed successful, regardless of how hard we try” (418).

The inclusion of attitude presents similar problems; positive attitude has many dimensions, is very difficult to define, and is extremely difficult to measure. It is also very easy to manipulate—students can fake a positive attitude if they think or know it will help their grade.

To a considerable extent, personal and social characteristics do contribute to achievement, but including a mark for attitude as part of a mark for a product blurs the assessment of the product and affects the validity and thus the meaning of the grade. Also, including a mark for effort or any of these characteristics means a double benefit for successful students and double (or triple or quadruple) jeopardy for less successful students. This is clearly unfair.

Several authors, including Marzano (2000a) and Halydana (1999), have suggested compromises in this area such that teachers may include behavioral components in grades, but I believe such compromises are inappropriate.

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(Stiggins 1997, 418)