

What Should Not Be in Grades?

Effort, participation, attitude, and other personal and social characteristics need to be reported separately from achievement. There is also no place for extra credit and bonus points.

Figure 3.1 shows an inappropriate grading plan for a performance subject.

Figure 3.1 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%

Attendance Scale	Late (Tardiness) Scale
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	

Reflecting On . . . Grading Plans

Consider the effects of the grading plan shown in Figure 3.1 on the following scenarios, in which a block schedule with 70 classes can be assumed:

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

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

Are these accurate 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, Participation, Attitude

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) provides a detailed analysis of the arguments for and against including these factors in grades. With regard to effort, he says that definitions of trying hard vary greatly from teacher to teacher; thus, if effort is included in the

grade, “we add noise into the grade interpretation process” (p. 418). *Noise* means “static, not clear meaningful signals” (p. 413). He also notes that “students can manipulate their apparent level of effort to mislead us” (p. 418).

Stiggins (1997) suggests 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, so we run the risk of perpetuating bias if we include effort and participation in grades. Another problem is that

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 —Stiggins, 1997, p. 418

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. (p. 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 approach is clearly inaccurate and unfair.

As with other aspects of assessment and grading, it is essential that the behavioral expectations be as clear to teachers, students, and parents as the academic expectations. One of the best examples of clarity in this area is provided by the British Columbia performance standards (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.). For grade levels K–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 8–10, separate “quick scales” and elaborated scales are provided for each grade level grouping with examples of how the scales can be taught and used. Figure 3.2 shows an example for Grades 8–10. Support ideas and material can also be found at The Network of Performance Based Schools Web site (www.npbs.ca).

Several authors, including Marzano (2006) and Haladyna (1999), have suggested compromises in this area such that teachers may include behavioral components in grades, but I believe such compromises are inappropriate. Haladyna (1999) classifies criteria for grading as supportable, arguable, and unsupported. His arguable list includes violation of deadlines, class participation, extra credit, improvement, and attendance. I believe that all of these should be placed clearly in the unsupported category. Strong effort, active participation, and positive attitude are highly valued attributes, but if grades are to have clear meaning, they should not include these attributes. These attributes are *reporting* variables, not *grading* variables. They need to be assessed as accurately and rigorously as possible and reported separately and regularly.

Figure 3.2 Quick Scale: Grades 8 to 10 Social Responsibility

This Quick Scale presents summary statements from the four categories in a one-page format for ease of use. In most cases, these scales can be used to evaluate student development anytime during the year. In the Elaborated Scale, each of the four categories is printed on a separate page.

Aspect	Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
CONTRIBUTING TO THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> appears apathetic or unfriendly and may try to manipulate or dominate others avoids participating in class and group activities; shows little sense of responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually courteous and friendly participates in class and group activities, but takes little responsibility for the school or community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually kind and friendly takes some responsibility for the school or community and contributes willingly to class and group activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> kind, friendly, and inclusive works actively to improve the school or community; often volunteers for extra responsibilities and shows leadership skills
SOLVING PROBLEMS IN PEACEFUL WAYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in conflict situations, often uses put-downs, insults, or sarcasm; has difficulty stating position clearly; may be illogical can describe simple, concrete problems or issues and generate some strategies; often ignores consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in conflict situations, tries to manage anger appropriately, listens respectfully, states opinion clearly, and tries to be fair can describe problems or issues, generate some strategies, consider immediate consequences, and evaluate actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in conflict situations, usually manages anger appropriately, listens respectfully, presents logical arguments, and can paraphrase opposing views can clarify problems or issues, generate strategies, weigh consequences, and evaluate actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in conflict situations, shows empathy and a sense of ethics, presents soundly reasoned arguments, and considers divergent views can clarify problems or issues, generate and analyze strategies, create an effective plan, and use evidence to evaluate actions
VALUING DIVERSITY AND DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sometimes disrespectful; may stereotype or avoid those perceived as different in some way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually respectful; supports those who speak up or take action to support diversity and defend human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> respectful and fair; increasingly willing to speak up or take action to support diversity and defend human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> respectful and ethical; speaks out and takes action to support diversity and defend human rights, even when that may not be a popular stance
EXERCISING DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tends to be egocentric and apathetic; displays little sense of community or responsibility for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows some sense of community-mindedness; may go along with positive actions organized by others but without much commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows a sense of responsibility and community-mindedness; increasingly interested in taking action to improve the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows a strong sense of community-mindedness and accountability; can describe and work toward an ideal future for the world

One example of a school that does this is the middle school at Jakarta International School, where educators have identified six “approaches to learning” that are evaluated on a frequency scale for each report card, namely, makes effective use of class time, demonstrates responsibility for own learning, contributes positively to the learning environment, is attentive and focused in class, collaborates effectively, and comes to class prepared and organized with homework if required. Additional examples of reporting procedures that include these student characteristics can be found in Figures 11.2a, 11.2b, 11.3a (elementary), and Figure 11.4a (secondary). An excellent structure for teaching and assessing learning related behaviors is provided by Costa and Kallick’s (2000) *Assessing and Reporting Habits of Mind*. They have identified 16 habits; this large number can be made manageable by focusing on 3 to 5 habits each grading period.

To summarize this issue, consider this statement by Reeves (2006): “We err gravely when we call compliance and politeness ‘algebra’ or ‘English’ or any other label that conflates proficiency with behavior” (p. 118).

