

### **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)



## HOW TO GRADE FOR LEARNING

Halydana (1999) classifies criteria for grading as supportable, arguable, and unsupportable. 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 unsupportable category. Strong effort, active participation, and positive attitude are highly valued attributes, but if grades are to have clear meaning they should not be included in grades; they are *reporting* variables, not grading variables. These attributes need to be assessed as accurately and rigorously as possible and reported separately and regularly. Examples of reporting procedures that include these student characteristics can be found in Figure 11.2-1 on page 214-215.

### **Late Work**

A major problem that overlaps both parts of this guideline is the issue of submitting required work on time. The following late homework policy for one college course was found on the Internet:

Homework turned in for grading in class on the date due will incur no penalty. Otherwise the following grade reductions are in effect:

- up to one day—a 5 percent reduction;
- two days late—a 10 percent reduction;
- three days late—a 20 percent reduction;
- four days late—a 40 percent reduction; and
- five days late—an 80 percent reduction.

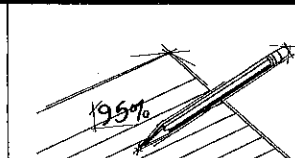
Homework extensions are only granted *before* homework is due. Do not attempt to obtain an extension on or after the due date.

At the high school level in my former school district, penalties for handing work in late have been as high as 10% per day to a maximum of 50% (including weekend days!).

There are two problems with these approaches. First, the penalty that students receive distorts their achievement and thus contributes to a mark and, ultimately, to a grade that does not have clear meaning. Second, the punitive nature of the penalty provides a powerful disincentive for students to complete any work after it is more than one or two days late. In both examples, no intelligent student would bother completing the work after three days. Such policies are obviously opposed to a learning/success orientation—that the work is done and that learning occurs holds more importance than when the work is done and when learning occurs. This does not mean

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## Chapter 3: Grading Individual Achievement



that handing work in on time is not important, but as I once heard Joel Barker say, “It is best to do it right and on time, but it is better to do it right and late than the reverse.”

In the school or college situation, there are several important considerations about due dates for student work. One is that required work is sometimes part of an instructional sequence and so needs to be submitted before marked work is returned. A second consideration is that teachers need to have a reasonable workload—they cannot be expected to mark huge amounts of work on the last day or two of a grading period.

In both situations, the concept of an absolute deadline after which no work will be accepted for inclusion in grades—in that grading period—may be appropriate and/or necessary. This does not mean that students automatically receive zeroes or severe penalties. In the case of work in an instructional sequence, this type of work usually has a formative purpose and so should not be included in grades anyway (see chapter 4); all the teacher needs to do is record that the work was not done or was handed in late. In the case of a lack of time for the teacher to grade, the most appropriate approach would be to record an incomplete and include the mark in the student’s grade in the next grading period, when the teacher has had a reasonable amount of time to assess the student’s work.

A third consideration for due dates is that these are frequently quite arbitrary, especially for major performance assessments such as term papers. In these—and in fact, in all—situations, teachers should encourage students to submit work on time, but if they do not, teachers should keep penalties as small as possible. For example, the teacher might deduct 1% or 2% per day to a maximum of 10%; record the fact of the tardiness; and consider the fact as a reporting, not a (major) grading, variable.

Think of your favorite author—let us call her Margaret. Imagine that when Margaret was in high school, she was a brilliant writer but always handed work in late. Using the punitive procedures described earlier, although receiving As or 90% or more on each piece of writing, Margaret would probably have received relatively low grades because her marks would have been reduced one or two letter grades, or 20% to 30%. The final grade would give no idea of her high quality of work or of her tardiness problem. Far better that Margaret get the 90% or better that she deserved as marks and that the report card state “95%, Margaret is a brilliant writer but she always hands her work in late.”

*The intent is that tardiness be dealt with appropriately, so grades have meaning and communicate clear, easily interpretable information about achievement, and second, that the procedures used are likely to assist students to eliminate the problem.*



## HOW TO GRADE FOR LEARNING

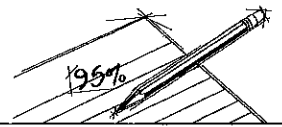
Now we have real information. If she is going to be a novelist or a playwright, it is not much of a problem—publishers have deadlines, but for novels and plays, the deadlines are often flexible. If, however, she has applied to be a journalist on a daily newspaper or to be an advertising copywriter, she will probably not be hired because in those occupations the deadlines are as important as the quality of the writing.

It must be emphasized again that the intent here is not to encourage students to hand work in late. The first intent is that tardiness be dealt with appropriately, so grades have meaning and communicate clear, easily interpretable information about achievement. The second intent is that the procedures used are likely to assist students to eliminate the problem. Years and years of teachers using penalties shows that they do not work and that they basically give students excuses to not do the work. A far more positive approach is one that has been developed in the York Region School District in Ontario. The approach, developed by Cathy Costello with assistance from Barry McKillop, is titled “Creating a Culture of Responsibility.” Just the name itself indicates the orientation of this approach. An adapted version is provided as Figure 3.6. Further details can be found in their excellent article in the classroom assessment issue of *Orbit*, published by Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (Costello and McKillop 2000).

Another author who illuminates this topic with clear logic and support for students is Forest Gathercoal in his wonderful book *Judicious Discipline* (1997), a must-read, at least for all school administrators with responsibility for discipline. He notes that

“lowering achievement grades for misbehavior does not always teach responsibility, but it always does pass on misinformation. By accepting and not grading down late work, educators send a professional message to students that completing assignments, receiving teacher feedback, and being fairly educated are all important to their educational success.” (142, 143).

An interesting source for teachers’ ideas on the subject of late work is the “Teacher Talk” section of January 2000 edition of *Classroom Notes Plus* published by the National Council of Teachers of English. This section contains ideas from an online discussion, “How Do You Handle Late Work.” Views range from open submission to advocating severe penalties and everything in between.



### Getting Work In On Time

1. Set clear and reasonable timelines with some student input.
2. Ensure that the expectations for the task/assignment are clearly established and understood.
3. Support the students who will predictably struggle with the task without intervention.
4. Find out why other students' work is late and assist them.
5. Establish the consequences for late work, such as:
  - after school follow-up
  - make-up responsibility within a supervised setting
  - parent contact
  - notation in the mark book for each assignment which is late
  - "grades" on a learning skills/work habits section of the report card
  - comments on the report card that reflect chronic lateness
6. Provide the opportunity for students to extend timelines:
  - student must communicate with the teacher in advance of the due date
  - student must choose situations carefully as this extension may only be used once/twice per term/semester
7. If all the above "fails" (i.e., work is still late/not done), use small mark penalties/deductions which do not distort achievement or motivation.

**Figure 3.6**

Adapted from "Creating a Culture of Responsibility" with permission from the York Region District School Board, Ontario, Canada.



### What's the Bottom Line?

What should be in grades? Grades should include achievement only, based on standards, or when lacking definitive standards, defined as broadly or narrowly as professional judgment dictates.

What should not be in grades? Effort, attitude, behavior, attendance, punctuality, tardiness, and so forth should not be in grades. These should be assessed and reported on separately. (See chapter 11.)