

What is the purpose of grading?

In my opinion, 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 Application as “criteria of evaluation”).

So my question is; should our grading systems we use reflect these goals?

My philosophy: (others are welcome too).

The grade a student receives should be a composite of factors including content knowledge, skill development AND..give the student feedback and encouragement to develop in the other, purpose of school.. goals as well. At the end of the day, the grade should reflect both content knowledge and “readiness” for the next step (the next class, the next school, the next “life path” choice).

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.

Example of Clark’s “hybridized standards based grading system.

Tennis ball throwing (Error of our ways) grading rubric.

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
Accuracy of science and concepts presented	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.

Your score _____(x multiplier) = ____/20pts. (This project multiplier = 1)

Note overall grade is based on “all 4s” equaling 88% = B+. (i.e., 20/23 = 88% = B+)

Total points possible then = 23 pts. (times a multiplier for larger labs and projects).

Rational:

The first item, invites the student to consider both “the minimum” required to complete the assignment, but also to consider 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” to do more. The score I give in this category includes all of those dimensions.

The second item, 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”.. are all domains of growth reflected on by this category.

The Third item: invites the student to develop their.. Creativity in writing, layout and use of illustrations is THE WAY to effectively communicate, attract an audience, “rise to the top” and get noticed. (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). (Creativity, quality of writing, motivation, self-confidence and initiative are all developed by giving the student feedback on creativity).

The fourth item. 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”.

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.

In practice, in my class, students learn to make an effort across all categories and more importantly, are constantly MOTIVATED to improve across all domains (content knowledge, writing skills, leadership, integrity, pride in workmanship.

Additionally, 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 (see second, attached grade sheet).

Finally, I use my 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.