



Effective, Efficient Grading

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Here are a few words of encouragement about writing for faculty from the UH Writing Center.

Grading student writing can be more manageable than many instructors think, because the instructor can decide what to grade and what not to grade.

TIPS on Grading: Getting a Grip

- Instructors often worry that if they assign writing they will end up spending too much time grading the student work.
- “Correcting” or heavily marking up student writing, for example, is only effective when the student will get a chance to revise, and even then, instructors should beware of setting themselves up as the “editorial authority” for the students’ work.
- Consider, instead, using less elaborate but equally emphatic feedback. For example, “*Unacceptable editing—rewrite and return*” tells a student how they’ve done (not good enough) and what they should do about it (edit better).
- When encountering so many errors that it becomes difficult to plow through the writing, the instructor can draw a line on the paper and indicate, “I stopped reading here because the errors made it impossible to go on.” Similarly, the instructor may find it useful to clearly communicate the limits of their marking in order to avoid inheriting responsibility for “fixing” the errors: for example, “*I only marked obvious errors,*” or “*not all editing errors have been marked.*”

Summing up

- Not every piece of writing needs to receive a formal grade;
- Not every grade needs to be finely detailed;
- Not all graded work needs to be corrected or commented upon.



Expert Advice:

Walvoord and Anderson's *Effective Grading* (1998) includes the following strategies to help keep grading manageable and effective:

Separate grading from commenting: feedback is an important element in student learning, but the feedback should only be as elaborate as the purpose dictates.

- A grade evaluates a performance, while a comment aims at getting the student to understand something or try something new in revision.
 - If a writing assignment's purpose is mainly to evaluate how well the student learned something, rather than to help them improve their writing, little or no commenting is required.
 - Judiciously reducing comments is a sure-fire way to save grading time; concise feedback still achieves the purpose.
- For example: "Proofread more carefully—lots of distracting mistakes" or "too many mechanical/grammatical errors": brief but "actionable" comments.

Ask students to organize their work for your efficiency: have students fill in and staple coversheets to their assignments, for example, so that you can use them to grade the paper and record comments. Sometimes small things can greatly increase your grading efficiency, such as . . .

- Having students fill out and attach grading forms
- Requiring tables of contents, executive summaries, and/or abstracts (you can concentrate on editing in these smaller spaces)
- Having students fill out self-evaluation forms (which can give you a place to start, namely, where the student identifies a strength or problem)

The UH Writing Center can help you develop materials that support adding writing to your course. Any questions? Please contact:

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