Inclusive and Equitable Assessment Practices for a Flexible Learning Environment

# How to Use This Resource

* Reflect on the assessment practices you use or recommend to faculty.
* Identify how these practices might perpetuate bias or inequities in the classroom.
* Reflect on your assumptions about assessments and practices that contribute to student learning.
* Consider the techniques described here and how you might implement them in your own teaching or consultation practice.
* Build in multiple modes of assessments: as you read through this resource, identify which combination of techniques and practices you’d like to implement or recommend to provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate their learning.

# Inclusive and Equitable Assessment Techniques

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## Consider Collective Testing/Test-Taking Teams

**Purpose:** Encourages collaboration and team work as well as individual effort.

**Process:**

* Students study for exams in assigned groups. This could include generating and answering a list of questions they expect to see on the test.
* Students take the test individually, and exams are graded individually.
* Students discuss and resubmit team responses to the exam for a group grade. These scores are typically higher than the individual grades!
* Individuals receive a score based on a combination of the two scores, depending on whether you want to emphasize collaborative (e.g., 2/3 group score, 1/3 individual score) or individual effort (e.g., 2/3 individual score, 1/3 group score).

## Student Self, Peer, and Group Evaluation

**Purpose:** Encourages students to develop critique, evaluation, and feedback skills by evaluating themselves, their peers, and their groups. Research has shown that students’ writing is improved after giving peer feedback, and peer review and feedback helps students practice interpretation, problem-solving, and explanation.

**Suggested Strategies:**

### Student Self-Evaluation

Students reflect upon and take stock of their own efforts in relation to their goals for the course. Questions can be open-ended and qualitative (“How would you prepare differently for this assignment next time?”) or closed-ended and quantitative (“What percentage of your time was spent reviewing notes/solving harder problems for practice/rereading?”).

### Student Peer Evaluation

Students evaluate their peers using agreed-upon criteria. This technique can be used with closed- or open-ended questions, and can be used on a variety of different assessment types (e.g., writing, group work, in-class presentations).

### Group Evaluation

Students offer evaluations of the groups’ dynamics (“how effectively did your group work together on this assignment?”), identify individual group members’ contributions, and reflect upon the value of group work (e.g., “give a specific example of something you probably wouldn’t have learned working alone”).

# Inclusive and Equitable Grading Practices

## Reconsider the Use of Grading Practices that Contribute to Bias

**Purpose:** Some grading practices seem neutral, but actually allow instructor bias and/or achievement/opportunity biases to operate. Grades and assessment should reflect student learning, not their behavior or our assessments of their behavior; if we must assess behaviors, we should be transparent about it.

**Avoid the Use of:**

**Extra Credit**

Extra credit often requires extra resources (time, money) or requires increased skill or advanced content knowledge that struggling students may not attempt.

**Penalties for Late Assignments**

Reducing scores on late work penalizes students for circumstances that are often beyond their control, and creates an inaccurate understanding of student achievement because it assesses skills beyond learning the content.

**Failing Grades for Academic Dishonesty**

Students engage in academic dishonesty when they believe they cannot succeed without cheating/plagiarizing, or they do not have a good understanding of academic honesty practices across courses and disciplines. Giving a failing grade and no makeup on assignments where students have been academically dishonest not only assesses a behavior as part of the grade, but it “exempts” them from the learning on that assignment.

**Grades for Participation or Effort**

Grading students on participation and effort often relies on behaviors that the instructor believes promote learning (e.g., participating verbally in class discussion)--beliefs that are often culturally biased and inequitable, and often benefit the instructor in terms of classroom management or perpetuate assumptions about positive classroom performance.

**Including Formative Assessments/Homework as Part of Final Grades**

Formative assessments are often treated in one of two ways: practice that is graded for accuracy, or assignments that are graded for “completion” but not accuracy. Grading formative assessments contradicts the notion of practice and mistakes as being essential to learning. Furthermore, students with less support and preparation may not attempt the practice, further compromising their performance. Grading for completion, on the other hand, provides an inaccurate assessment of student learning and progress toward course learning goals.

## Consider Non-Traditional Techniques to Calculate Grades

**Purpose:** Traditional grade calculations rely on averaging students’ scores across a semester, which can often represent varied life circumstances and educational dis/advantages more than student performance.

**Suggested Strategies:**

### Weight More-Recent Performance

Rather than averaging scores across a semester, giving more weight to more-recent performances allows students to show improvement over time, recover from mistakes, and show that growth takes time and effort.

### Use Minimum Grading Standards

Establish a minimum grade (e.g., 50/100) that students are guaranteed to receive even if they do not turn the assignment in. This can help students who experience “intermittent failures” (due to disruptions in their lives) maintain their motivation and perform well overall.

### Implement “Ungrading”

Ungrading is a practice wherein assessments in the course focus on student self-assessment and development of metacognitive skills in alignment with personal goals and objectives for learning. Though practices vary across instructors and disciplines, students are typically prompted to engage in self-evaluative work that asks them to reflect upon their learning in the course. Self-assessment can include short essays, collaborative work with reflective components, or process-based assessments (e.g., lab notebooks that focus on students’ metacognitive development and thought processes). Some instructors may have students give themselves a final grade in the course, with instructors making adjustments only when absolutely necessary and through discussion with students.

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## Use Anonymous/Blind Grading Techniques

**Purpose:** Anonymizing student work can reduce the impact of our conscious and unconscious biases (both positive and negative).

**Suggested Strategies:**

**Cover Student Names**

Cover up student names (or have students put their names on the last page of their assignments) and shuffle assignments before grading. Many Learning Management Systems (LMSes) also have an option for anonymous grading.

**Use Student Personal Identification Numbers**

Give students a personal identification number. Instead of their name, they can write this number on their assessment or other work, and you can periodically provide students with new ID numbers if they become recognizable.

**Typed Assignments**

Handwriting can be identifiable, and thus, where appropriate, encourage students to type their assignments whenever possible.

**Grade the Same Section or Question for all Students at the Same Time**

When grading exams, quizzes, or other worksheets, an instructor can grade one section or question for all students at the same time. This can minimize the influence of between-student biases on scoring if the name is covered, and can increase the reliability of test scores.

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