



Center for Teaching and Learning

Standards-based Grading: Emphasizing Learning and Deemphasizing Grades

What It Is

Standards-based grading (SBG) is connected to mastery learning. SBG is [different](#) from traditional grading practices and exemplifies these elements:

- Students are provided with a list of clear course learning objectives (known as standards).
- Students' work is graded using a form of pass/fail grading instead of points.
- Students are given several opportunities to reassess/reattempt mastery of any standard.
- Only the most recent and/or consistent evidence of a student's understanding should count toward the course final grade.
- Final course grade is based on how many standards a student mastered.

How It Works

Determine and clarify learning objectives/targets or standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the backward design approach to write assessable standards. • Frame standards as "I can...statements" or big questions. • Explicitly organize course instruction and resources around standards.
Establish a grading system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a binary rubric "mastered" or "not mastered." Do not give partial credit. • Use the EMRN or a 0-4 point scoring rubric to assess each standard. • Use scores to communicate mastery and how students may reassess.
Determine components of course grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include requirements for content mastery (product goals) and behavioral incentives (process goals). • Report students' performance on process goals separately from content mastery (product goals). • Align tests and projects, and feedback from assessments with specific learning objectives/standards.
Plan assessments and reassessment attempts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage assessments and reassessments efficiently. Schedule regular reassessment times. • Have students complete a reassessment contract to initiate reassessment. • Adjust tests to maintain academic integrity. • To manage reassessments in large classes, make exams cumulative; build reassessments into existing assessments such as quizzes, unit exams, and final exam (Zimmerman, 2020).

BENEFITS

- Alignment of standards and assessments provides greater clarity of course expectations.
- Reassessments allow students to reflect on and correct errors in their understanding.
- Conversations with instructors tend to focus on content instead of concerns over partial credit.

ADVICE

- The best place to start SBG is [with questions](#).
- Students may be new to SBG, clarify the components of the system consistently throughout the term.
- If SBG is not feasible, use [4 simple ways to ease the spotlight off points](#). Also, [make your assessments help students learn](#).

Sources: [Beatty, I. D. \(2013\)](#); [Clark, D. 2022](#); [Elsinger, J & Drew, L. \(2020\)](#); [Scarlett, M. H. \(2018\)](#); [Talbert, R. 2022](#); [Zimmerman, J. K. \(2020\)](#).



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