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## Grading

When we talk about safety for students, we usually think about security guards and closed campuses. The safety we are looking for is deeper. If students are going to try, there has to be a hope for success. None of us continues to work at things if we always lose.

By first grade, many children see little hope for success. Part of this comes from the idea that all students must learn all subjects. Another comes from common grading practices. Students who are achieving at the top of the class like to fight for a good grade, to work until they get an A or B. Many other students are nearly paralyzed by this practice.

If there is no way to get a good mark, a student is likely to get angry or feel hopeless. When students feel angry and hopeless, they get in trouble to save face. Evidence that grading is an issue:



- Student is frequently in detention or ICE
- Student slams book around rather than getting started
- Student sits and stares at the work
- Grades are low or failing
- Homework is seldom or never turned in



Remember how you felt when you got a bad grade to get a sense of the anger and hostility that comes from the first few failures, and then think about what you did. Are some of your students doing the same thing? Is it thought stopping? Do you need to do something to relieve the hopelessness? Did you ever actually get a headache from feeling frantic about it? If it is the first few times you get a bad grade, you do. Pretty soon, it becomes one more piece of evidence that suggests you don't have what it takes for brains. We don't take this kind of failure well, so we do something about it, and it isn't usually studying harder.



## Solutions

- Use benchmarks to explain things accomplished.
- Focus on what the student does know.
- Isolate next step student needs to take to continue to achieve.
- Use informal assessments to recognize what might work to extend knowledge.
- Listen in while a student explains an emerging concept to a peer. It will tell you all kinds of things that the student does grasp and what small pieces are missing .
- Use a rubric (p. 7) so students know how successful they are and what to do to improve on each task.
- Have a student write the rubric for the task, so all the steps are clear.
- Give students an opportunity to choose how they will prove understanding.
- Start instruction back at the level of success and understanding. It allows the student to make rapid progress and feel hopeful about ability to learn.

<i>Sample rubric:</i>	Mastery	Competent	Needs Support
skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Shows work</li> <li>. Details are clear</li> <li>. Work is neat and paper is clean</li> <li>. Work is handed in on time</li> <li>. Process was started and completed by self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows work</li> <li>Details are clear</li> <li>Answer is correct</li> <li>Work is neat and paper is clean</li> </ul>	<u>Any of these elements is missing</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows work</li> <li>Details are clear</li> <li>Answer is correct</li> <li>Work is neat and paper is clean</li> </ul>

## What is a Rubric or Checklist?

A rubric is a scoring guide that describes criteria for student performance and differentiates among different levels of performance within those criteria. Because rubrics set forth specific criteria, define precise requirements for meeting those criteria, and often assign numerical scores to each level of performance, they provide teachers with an effective, objective method for evaluating skills that do not generally lend themselves to objective assessment methods. Rubrics simplify teacher assessment of student work and provide students, parents, and administrators with an answer to the age-old "Why did you give it this grade?" question. And, at their very best, rubrics provide students with standards and expectations they can use to evaluate their performance while completing the assignment.

[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/curr248.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr248.shtml)

Example of **rubric/checklist** a student could develop:

Assignment: Write a one page essay about how safe you feel at school.

Checklist	Rubric	
	Excellent	Adequate
1. Punctuation is correct.	Punctuation is completely correct.	Sentences are complete.
2. Words are spelled correctly.	Spelling is 100% accurate.	Spelling is 85% correct.
3. The main statement is clear.		
4. There are three supporting paragraphs.	Three supporting paragraphs are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. written with a beginning thesis</li> <li>. make a cogent point</li> <li>. give examples to support ideas</li> </ul>	Three supporting paragraphs with examples to support main ideas.
5. The supporting arguments make sense.		
6. Sentences contain 7 or more words.	Supporting arguments are creative and compelling	The supporting arguments make sense.
7. Summary is clear and makes the point.	Sentences are robust, including 10 <sup>th</sup> grade vocabulary	Sentences contain 7 or more words.
8. The essay is cogent -- stays focused.	Summary is clear and makes the point.	Summary paragraph.
	The final paragraph restates thesis, reviews, supports and conclusion is compelling	

**Here is an example of a rubric, using points, that is based on students evaluating cooperative learning.**

Thorough Understanding - 4 points

- Consistently and actively works toward group goals.
- Is sensitive to the feelings and learning needs of all group members.
- Willingly accepts and fulfills individual role within the group.
- Consistently and actively contributes knowledge, opinions, and skills.
- Values the knowledge, opinion and skills of all group members and encourages their contribution.
- Helps group identify necessary changes and encourages group action for change.

Good Understanding - 3 points

- Works toward group goals without prompting.
- Accepts and fulfills individual role within the group.
- Contributes knowledge, opinions, and skills without prompting.
- Shows sensitivity to the feelings of others.
- Willingly participates in needed changes.

Satisfactory Understanding - 2 points

- Works toward group goals with occasional prompting.
- Contributes to the group with occasional prompting.
- Shows sensitivity to the feelings of others.
- Participates in needed changes, with occasional prompting.

Needs Improvement - 1 point

- Works toward group goals only when prompted.
- Contributes to the group only when prompted.
- Needs occasional reminders to be sensitive to the feelings of others.
- Participates in needed changes when prompted and encouraged.



## Structure

Evidence that structure is an issue:



Student is constantly testing the limits and trying to expand the boundaries



Any change in daily routine is upsetting for a specific youngster and transitions don't flow



Students are chatting and being called back to task at least twice in each period



Students flair up when called back to task - "It's not fair" "Do we have to?" "We already did"



Extremes of reaction are present - resentment, pushing, lax actions like sliding feet, pushing others, slamming books, fearful or angry looks



Remember how you felt when a teacher was too strict? It creates a feeling of resentment and everyone looks to the "bad" kid to get even for everyone. Most students sulk, whine, tattle or 'disappear' because a nasty adult in authority pains us. Of course, there is a whole continuum of inappropriate structure. We hate the teacher who cannot make anyone behave even more than the one with the hickory stick. The only thing worse than feeling bullied is realizing that the teacher cannot control one of the students and we are all going to suffer at a child's whims. It means little work gets done and a lot of unhappiness and a year of feeling unsafe.



## Solutions

Isolate the problems and see if it is just one youngster who is upset, or one youngster who is acting out for everyone -- doing the dirty work of embarrassing the teacher. If it is one student:

- + with the student, establish a pattern of work to be accomplished in 5 minute units
- + set up a self monitoring process, so student self reports on each 5 minute section, each day

example on p. -----

- + start the class with a short assignment, already in place that gets everyone started immediately
- + walk near the student's work area about every 4 minutes, and use supportive messages at each pass (can be non-verbal, like a smile, wink, touch on the desk)
- + set up a ritual for student self soothing, on those days when too upset to start work assignment, may be reading at rocking chair, studying terms in a bean bag area, reviewing for test with a peer, brewing green tea to settle down (get parent permission).
- + review rules to maintain a learning community and get input from everyone, and acknowledge the ability each has to support or sabotage a peaceful learning setting
- + have a 3x5 card session, teacher and students put main gripe about how learning is being thwarted on one side, then what personal thing s/he could do to help build a better community on the other. Now an open working session, lets each person tell the problem, which can be listed out, and the one thing that each can do to help the learning situation.
- + review procedures that promote learning, initiating new ones where needed
- + review rules (ethical guidelines) and ask for support in all students treating one another with respect, dignity and promoting a safe learning environment

Three great rules for classrooms:

- 1. Respect one another**
- 2. Do your best**
- 3. Promote learning**

*In the Zone* has a discussion of structure, power and control that discusses the importance of adequate structure and methods to enhance the safety of the classroom.



## Peer pressure

Evidence that peer pressure is an issue:



Student is acting like Jim Carey - panning for a laugh, high five, snickers



There is a general sense of disrespect for the teacher, not openly defiant, but guarded looks, intentional infractions, spit wads, many students without pencils, anonymous cat calls



When teacher remarks on student success, others make fun of the target using terms like "teacher's pet", "brown nose" or "Go Tina, get busy,"



Teacher is baited into losing temper, often successfully, with growing frequency



Lots of "looks" exchanged, sighs, slammed books, under breath comments when teacher assigns works or asks for cooperation



One student identified and badgered - nasty names, pushes, laughter, physical violence



Remember that teacher everyone disliked and wanted to torment? It is every teacher's nightmare to think that might be who s/he has become. If you see the evidence, it is possible to turn things around. The quickest way is to stop taking yourself so seriously. Laugh a little, turn the joke on yourself and help students relax. Give students respect instead of demanding it and the power struggles will subside. This student behavior comes from fear and anger. A well developed and implemented cooperative learning unit could turn the friction into a positive situation



## Solutions

Self assess to see what is triggering the resentment, and stop doing it

Check for sarcasm and cynicism. . . most students can't win such verbal exchanges, and the rage and distrust they feel for a teacher who uses them builds and has a boomerang effect

Get a peer to come into the classroom and give you feedback on interaction patterns - then give yourself time to assimilate the findings and make constructive changes (consider taping yourself and monitoring progress)

Get a peer to come into the classroom and help defuse the anger (do not do this alone!)

Be certain you are not acting the age of the students. Most people did not have satisfactory teen years, and it is tempting to try to finish or redo the picture from a different power base

Involve students in making and keeping the rules to stop the "back draft" effect (see Rules: Working as a team)

Use self monitoring and proactive discipline techniques and eschew any form of punitive retaliation

Use the energy surrounding teen need for friendships to further learning, peer mentoring, group work, pairs working together, jigsaw approaches to assignments.

Students actually learn more by working together than alone - and it sets up positive work behaviors, since few of us work in isolation and learning to get along is a great set of life skills

+ A well developed and implemented cooperative learning unit can turn friction into positive energy

+ Promote the ability to trust and be trustworthy as part of group work

+ Teach communication skills - and practice them often.

- taking turns
- "I" statements that express how the person feels
- recognizing if it is your "child, adult or parent voice" you are using
- determining what emotion is driving the need to share active listening
- active listening techniques and questioning when uncertain
- sharing factual and emotional responses to expectations, relationship