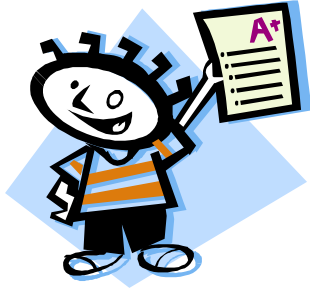


## Module # 3

### Integrating Feedback and Assessment into Your Class: A Spectrum of Possibilities<sup>1</sup>



#### The aim of this module is to help you:

- Think about the issue of assessment in your seminar
- Provide examples of various kinds of feedback you can use
- Create a rubric that works for you

Your first class is almost over. The students are excited and already engaged with each other, chatting and talking about the semester ahead. All is going well as you glance at the clock: 15 minutes left. Then it happens. A student raises his hand and says, “So, how are you going to grade us?” What do you say?

Students are often curious about the assessment and feedback they will be receiving during the seminar, and being prepared to answer this question is important. However, it is also important not to allow grades to become the focus of the first class. Grades, after all, are not the goal of SAGES—learning is. This module will help you think through some of the issues surrounding assessment and feedback in your seminar.

### Staying on Target: Learning Objectives



While it may not always seem that way to your students, grades do not exist for their own sake. Rather, grades are a tool to help guide students toward the learning goals you have created for the course. As you work to develop your grading rubrics and scheme for the seminar, it is a good idea to revisit the learning objectives you have outlined for the course. For each assessment, ask yourself:

**How will this assessment help students develop their skills and move closer to the learning objectives we have in the seminar?**

<sup>1</sup> This module is based on materials created by Dr. Mano Singham.

## Best Practices for Feedback and Assessment

While you will develop your own style for feedback and assessment, there are some tips from veteran instructors that may help you prepare for the seminar:

- Be wary of spurious objectivity
- Avoid an assessment scheme that can condemn a student early in the semester to a low final grade
- Assess only the important things—either make “small things” a part of the learning goals or let them go
- Vary the type of assessments you use; you may want to include:
  - Written papers
  - Oral presentations
  - Group projects
  - Peer feedback
  - Self feedback
  - Journaling
- Minimize the number of gradations and avoid over-quantifying
  - i.e. a  $\sqrt{-}$  /  $\sqrt{/}$  /  $\sqrt{+}$  scale is better than a 0-5, which is better than a 0-100 scale...
- Minimize the salience of grades—don’t talk about them all the time

**!** Feedback is not synonymous with grades. You can include non-graded assessment and feedback in your seminar (for example, writing back and forth with students on Blackboard or in weekly journals). Such feedback is often very valuable in helping create a dynamic environment in which your students strive for personal improvement.

## Starting Off Right: Clarify your Expectations

In general, students are not upset about being assessed. They are upset, however, when they are **surprised** by the grades or feedback they receive, because clear expectations were not established at the outset.

### Surprise Occurs When Students:

- Do not fully know or understand the criteria for assessment
- Do not know or understand the benchmarks for performance levels
- Have an unrealistic idea of their own performance prior to the assessment

## Strategies to Avoid Surprises:



- Establish benchmarks for the quality of work you expect
- Create rubrics and share them with your students, so that:
  - Students know what you are looking for
  - You achieve greater uniformity and consistency in your grading
- Avoid mixing learning and assessing situations
- Have an assignment early on that is not graded, but does give feedback to students so they can get a feel for your expectations
- When possible, involve students in setting up the evaluation process
- Use assessments that have meaning in relation to the course goals
- Give students practice at attaining the assessment goals, and feedback on what they need to do to improve their performance
- Include comments when giving back grades; avoid just giving a grade with no formative feedback
- Encourage revision of papers

**!** If you are working with a co-instructor, it is very important that you two discuss your expectations around grading and assessment. While you may have differing perspectives, you can arrive at a common ground regarding how you will handle giving feedback to students. The effects of your teamwork (or of its absence) are felt by the students, as reflected in the following statement from a First Seminar student:

*“It is hard for the students when the instructor and the co-instructor are not on the same page. If one of them is giving different feedback and suggestions and even different grades, then this hurts the students. We are never sure who is grading so we do not know how to write things because when they are each looking for different things, it hurts the students writing wise.”*



## Trust: The Foundation of Feedback

You may or may not have students come knocking at your door after you return an assignment. Regardless of the issues that arise inside and outside the classroom, establishing an environment of trust is important. Trust is the cornerstone of your relationship with your students.

### Trust becomes an issue when teachers:

- Are suspected of having a “hidden agenda”
- Do not apply criteria consistently
- Change their expectations midway through the term
- Are distant or condescending toward students

### Strategies to avoid trust issues:



- Use your first class to create a good impression and establish rapport
- Be clear in your own mind about what your assessments represent
- Use evaluation to show levels of student achievement against known criteria
- Use criteria for awarding grades that are defensible on primarily educational grounds
- Create grading options for students when possible
- Be honest about the inevitable subjective element present in evaluation

**!** You may have students whose first language is not English, or who have serious difficulty with writing. If you find yourself asking “**Where do I start?**” when trying to make comments on a paper, you may need to refer these students to the **Writing Center** or the **SAGES Peer Writing Crew**. Afterwards, ask the students about their progress in their tutoring sessions, and continue to provide careful feedback on their writing. Otherwise, they may feel that you have shunted them aside and regard their writing issues as beneath your notice. For further guidance, visit the Writing Resources website:

<http://www.case.edu/artsci/engl/writing/pedagogy>

## Creating & Using Your Rubric

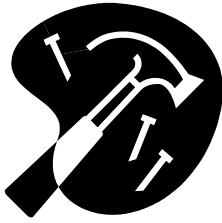
The SAGES office has created a paper-grading rubric to help establish consistency across the seminar sections. You can, however, adapt this rubric to fit your own class, assignments, and teaching style. You may want to have rubrics not only for written papers, but also for team projects, oral presentations, and even class participation. There are a few things to keep in mind when creating and using a rubric:



- **List your specific criteria for assessing students. If you are going to grade them on grammar as well as creativity, list both of these areas**
- **Define your criteria, describing what you mean by “creativity” or “thorough research”**
- **Let students know clearly what scale you are using, and what each indicator means (i.e., what does it mean to get a  $\checkmark$  vs. a  $\checkmark$ -)**
- **When writing comments on student work, it is most effective to enter brief comments throughout the paper and then summarize your feedback at the end**

**!** We often are so focused on helping students improve that we dwell on their mistakes and forget to tell them what they are already doing right. Yet students need to know what their strengths are, so they can build on those. When you give feedback, recognize achievements even as you help students work on their weaknesses.





## **SPECIAL TOOLBOX:** **Journaling as a Tool for Feedback**

Many SAGES instructors have found student journaling to be a valuable instructional tool. Some instructors have students turn in handwritten journals every week or every other week; others use Blackboard (either anonymously or not) to conduct dialogue back and forth outside the classroom. The journal can be free-flowing, or you can give students specific questions to answer: “How was class for you today? What did you not say that you wish you would have?”

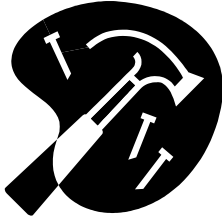
These journals are rarely graded. Instead, they are used as another window into the students’ minds, and as a forum in which you can provide personal attention and feedback. Through your comments in their journals, you may:

- **Encourage quiet students to speak more during class**
- **Find out what a student’s passion is**
- **Learn how the seminar is going, by having students give you feedback**
- **Help students make connections to their experience, the course material, and possible paper ideas**
- **Refer students to other resources**

### **For example:**

Jan. 15, 2004 -- Today we discussed Sacks book, *An anthropologist from Mars*. The conversation was interesting, although I did not talk much. Reading his book reminded me of the time when I lived in Germany for 3 years and I felt like an alien who had landed in another planet. Everything about the place we lived seemed so foreign to me and I would spend hours sitting in a coffee shop just watching people, trying to figure out what was going on and how their culture worked. I remember this one woman who.....

This is a great observation and connection to our reading, Josh! I would love to hear more about your experience, you should share it with the class, as I am sure some do not know what it is like to be in a foreign place...



## SPECIAL TOOLBOX: Example Rubric with Instructor's Comments<sup>2</sup>

### USNA 204 PAPER RUBRIC

Code: √+ ⇒ criteria met at a high level; √ ⇒ criteria met; √- ⇒ more work needed

CRITERIA	MEASURES	READER COMMENTS
<b>Commitment</b>	Author has thought deeply about the topic and shows enthusiasm for it; care and effort has gone into the writing.	√+. The essay shows careful thought and understanding. I think that you have promise as a writer because you have a good sense of the 'flow' of words, which makes your writing easy to read.
<b>Argument</b>	Thesis is clearly defined and its importance is established; writing reflects the author's own voice; point of view is clear; arguments are made clearly and simply; alternative points of view are considered and evaluated; conclusions are the author's own synthesis and not just a summarizing or paraphrasing of other people's arguments.	√. You make your arguments well in general. There are some weaknesses and gaps, though, that I have indicated in the text comments.  The main thing that struck me was your tendency to make generalizations without substantiation. You don't have to over-reach to make your point. Sometimes understated arguments are more effective than a sledgehammer approach.
<b>Evidence</b>	Evidence (citations to authorities, quotes, examples, others forms?) is provided for key assertions.	√. You have to list the Kuhn and Popper sources at the end of the paper. Also, you refer to a 1965 debate between the two and the citation for that should be given too. That debate looks interesting. Also, you have provided citations for the direct quotes but you should also give them for any assertions that you make on behalf of other authors, even if it not a direct quote.
<b>Research</b>	Evidence of solid research and of good judgment in selection of research sources.	√+. Although extra reading was not required for this essay, you have done so and that is great.
<b>Organization</b>	Each paragraph makes just one point or a few closely related points; purpose of each paragraph in overall structure of argument is clear; good transitions between paragraphs.	√. The organization is quite good.
<b>Style</b>	Writing strives to be concrete (via use of examples, stories, evidence, images, and metaphors); good choice of words, images and metaphors;	√. There are some style issues indicated in the text. Avoid inserting words and phrases that do not add to the meaning.

<sup>2</sup> Provided by courtesy of Professor Mano Singham

# ?? Questions for Reflection

## ?? Questions for Reflection

### ***Questions for personal reflection:***

- What is my personal philosophy regarding feedback and assessment?
- What kind of assessment do I feel will be most effective for the learning goals I have created?
- Does my feedback to students highlight their strengths as well as their weaknesses?

### ***Questions for reflection with colleagues:***

- What kinds of assessment do you use in your seminar?
- What issues have you encountered regarding grades and how did you deal with them?
- What kind of qualitative feedback do you give your students? How often?