

Beyond the Average: Why Teacher Judgement Matters in Assessment

Objectivity in grading

Starch and Elliottⁱⁱ conclude that objectivity in grading is a myth. Even with training in grading, assigned grades can vary wildlyⁱⁱⁱ.

Grading judgements need anchors.

- What is being assessed? (learning outcomes)
- How is it being assessed? (performance criteria)

"We can't decide how to assess until we know what we want students to understand and what that understanding looks like in practice"^{iv}.

Subjectivity is **not** a bad word!

- We can't hide behind *objectivity* when determining grades.
- This frees you up to engage your **professional judgement!**

What should a grade reflect?

Grading can feel like a guessing game without understanding the:



- purpose of grades
- school's cultural norms around grading

A purpose statement can help guide difficult grading decisions.

- Consider the following (first round) **purpose statement:**

THE PURPOSE OF GRADING IS TO PROVIDE STUDENTS AND PARENTS WITH A DEFENSIBLE REFLECTION OF A STUDENT'S DEMONSTRATED MASTERY OF COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES, BASED ON CLEAR PERFORMANCE CRITERIA.

Grading Scenario 1

		 Aisha	 Mateo
Assignment 1	(10%)	85%	57%
Quiz 1	(20%)	83%	64%
Quiz 2	(20%)	86%	73%
Assignment 2	(10%)	80%	85%
Unit Test	(40%)	87%	90%
Weighted Unit Grade		85% (A-)	78% (B)

Calculated grades of two students are shown in the table.

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D
95%	90%	85%	80%	75%	70%	65%	60%	55%	50%	45%

Grades do not always need to be determined by an algorithm.

Do you value growth? If so, the 78% (B) may not be the appropriate grade.

Do you value *recency* and *consistency*? If so, then the *purpose statement* needs to change.

Modified Purpose Statement:

THE PURPOSE OF GRADING IS TO PROVIDE STUDENTS AND PARENTS WITH A DEFENSIBLE REFLECTION OF A STUDENT'S MOST RECENT AND CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATED MASTERY OF COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES, BASED ON CLEAR PERFORMANCE CRITERIA.

There is no *right* or *wrong* answer to the question of what grade Mateo has earned. It is a question of **professional** judgement. Consider what Tom Schimmer^v has to say:

"Once a student reaches a level of understanding, it is irrelevant that the student was once at a lower level."

Grading Scenario 2

Goal of determining an *average* is to report the central tendency. We need to be mindful about *how* we determine that *average*.

- Mean
- Median

Consider the list of percent grades below, and the reasonable equivalent as recorded on a proficiency scale. The means and medians are shown below.

Grades										Mean	Median	Without Zero	
												Mean	Median
82%	75%	85%	91%	0%	88%	83%	60%	78%		71%	82%	80%	83%

0 – 4 Proficiency Scale										With Zero		Without Zero	
										Mean	Median	Mean	Median
3	3	3	4	0	4	3	1	3		78%	83%	83%	83%

Off all calculated averages, **the outlier is the percent mean average.**

Mean averaging is heavily affected by outliers and is not always the most defensible representation of central tendency.

There are no *right* grades, only *defensible* grades.

Determining a grade requires you to render a **professional judgement** based on a **preponderance of evidence**. You are trying to *convict your students of understanding*.

Summary Points

- Objectivity is a myth. Your subjectivity is a strength.
- No one is in a better position than you to make judgements about the quality of your students' demonstrations of learning.
- If we value growth, so too should our grading practices.
- Mean averaging is not the only way to calculate a grade.
- Zeros can be disproportionately punitive, but there are ways to mitigate that.
- Don't be afraid to use your professional judgement to override an algorithm.
- When in doubt, talk to your teaching team and your administrators!

ⁱ Starch, D., Elliott, E.C. (1912). *Reliability of the grading of high-school work in English*, School Rev. Vol20, pp.442-457.

ⁱⁱ Starch, D., Elliott, E.C. (1913). *Reliability of the grading of high-school work in mathematics*, School Rev. Vol21, pp.254-259.

ⁱⁱⁱ Brimi, H.M. (Nov, 2011). *Reliability of grading high school work in English*, Practical Assessment, Research, & Evaluation. Vol16(17).

^{iv} Wiggins, G., McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

^v Schimmer, T. (2016). *Grading From the Inside Out*. Solution Tree Press