

When I was young, I was extremely worked up over grades. I'm not exactly sure where this pressure came from, as my parents insist that it did not come from them. There was something about the sound of a C, D, or F that is less than appealing; the name sounded worse than the consequences. For years, I lived with the burden of being an overachiever and felt the pressure to be perfect. When I graduated with my bachelor's degree in 2002, I finally came to a time in my life when I wasn't guided by grades, but instead by my own achievements. It felt liberating; the weight was lifted.

Now that I'm in a position to give grades to students, a new kind of burden comes. I hold part of their future in their hands and take the idea of grades very seriously. The part I take seriously is not the grades themselves but ensuring the grades I give. I want to engage my students but to also reward them with the knowledge they truly can demonstrate. I double check my math, review my answers, I allow extra credit to replace "brain farts" and "bad days." I also am willing to negotiate grades when the situation arises. I also make sure that give grades for the points they earn, not compared to the points their neighbor earns. Grading on a curve only turns the students against each other and should only be used when the entire class does poorly.

Teachers sometimes develop a policy that is very black and white regarding both grades and teaching philosophies. While I cannot reverse poor grades, there should be some sort of cushion that will help counter the "bad day." In my Music Fundamentals Class, I give weekly quizzes and drop the lowest grade. This prepares them for the format of the midterm and the final since those grades cannot be dropped. This will also help balance the grades out in case those larger exams don't go as well. Students also get credit for completing their homework, being graded on each individual assignment.

More grades give a better idea on what kind of student a person is academically. In the event I teach in a large class, my teaching assistants will have the responsibility in grading to allow students to be evaluated multiple times and keep it a reasonable work load for me as a teacher. Two or three exam grades do not always measure a student's intelligence. Multiple kinds of grades can also accommodate students who learn differently. Although students need to learn to cope with different forms of assessment, it is unfair of a teacher to only use one method. I took a general education class as an undergraduate which had nothing but multiple choice exams and found myself devoting more to that class than the courses in my major. There is something definitely wrong that this picture.

I have high expectations of my students but I also maintain objectivity. When I graded my students' first midterm in my Music Fundamentals class, I covered their names, so I had no previous association with the test. I felt as if I graded in a fairer manner, giving students the points they deserve without making assumptions about the result of a student's test.

During my career as a teacher I expect many situations to come up for which no course or student teaching could prepare me. In general, if a student is having personal struggles which may prevent them from completing their work by the specific due date, I will encourage them to let me know about the situation as soon as possible. As someone who is registered at disability services myself, I can understand that situations arise, which can inhibit a student's success in a course. Since it will be stated in the syllabus from day one, I will expect students to take the responsibility to inform me of a disability, provide me with confirming and accommodations. I will be less sympathetic with

students who fail to inform me by a specific given time (stated in the syllabus). Everything will be laid out in the syllabus to make it as fair as possible.

The last thing I want is for students to be worked up over grades in my class. It isn't worth it and can lead to unnecessary stress and hardship. I want to maintain flexibility, addressing each student's needs on a case by case basis, as I do with teaching. I use different techniques depending on the students, which function in the grey world we live. The key to a good teacher is flexibility and fairness and to ensure the students can take something away from the classroom, that they learn what they need to learn and be given multiple ways to demonstrate their knowledge.