

Memorandum

To: Colleagues
From: Members of the 2002-2003 Committee for the Support of Teaching
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Subject: Including specific information about grading criteria in course syllabi
Date: May 2, 2003

In faculty discussions about grading at Brandeis during the 2002-2003 academic year, we considered how to reduce the frequency of student complaints about final grades in courses. The Committee for the Support of Teaching believes that including detailed criteria about how grades will be assigned and/or what constitutes an A, B, C, D, or failing grade in syllabi is a specific action that all instructors can initiate to help students understand expectations regarding standards of performance. Students are eager to have such guidelines.

We encourage you to think about how you might include more explicit criteria in your own syllabi. We offer examples from courses offered in the Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences in the hope that they will be helpful.

Examples from Humanities Courses:

Example I (medium lecture)

Course requirements include a midterm (Monday, March 11, covering units 1-16 [Genesis-Judges]), a three hour final, and a 5-10 page paper (topics must be approved by April 8; paper is due May 1 at 5P.M.). The midterm will comprise 30% of your grade, the final 35% and the paper 35%.

(Before each exam and paper, sample exam questions or a discussion of the structure of the assignment is distributed and posted online)

Example II (seminar)

Class requirements include:

1. Active class participation. This will count for 10% of your grade. Students will be called on to read, translate and comment on material they were previously asked to prepare. Any student may tell me before class (up to twice) that he or she is not prepared, and may "pass" for that class. Regular attendance is expected of all students.
2. Four short (1-2 pages) critiques of scholarly articles (not assigned for class) on Deuteronomy. These must be handed in by September 25, October 19, November 16 and December 7. You may hand these in earlier, but late work will penalized. These critiques will count for 30% of your grade.
3. A take-home section of the final examination, on a general topic on Deuteronomy. This will count 25% of your grade, and will be due when you begin your final examination.

4. A regularly scheduled three hour final examination that will count for 35% of your grade. This will have two parts: You will be asked to translate and fully discuss several passages covered in class (75%), and will be asked to translate and very briefly discuss several prose passages that we have not covered in class (25%).

If you have any special needs or concerns with respect to this class, be sure to discuss these with me during the first two weeks of class.

Examples from Science Courses:

Example I (large lecture)

Homework: There will be ten problem sets for the semester. The list of the problems are given on pp. 7-8 of this hand out. No late homework answers will be accepted because immediately after the due date, the answers will be placed on reserve in the Science Library. Each homework assignment is worth 6 points.

Checks: In all class periods, 10:10 am – 11:00 am (except the first and the three test periods), there will be a 2-point check to be turned in at the end of the class. If you miss a class, you miss out on the possible two points.

Recitation exercises: There will be ten administered at the end of the evening sessions. Each exercise will be offered three times. You must take one version but you may try as many as three. Your highest score will be recorded. Each exercise is worth 8 points.

Quizzes: Two quizzes are scheduled for the evening sessions. They will be given after all students' questions are answered. A quiz lasts for about 30 – 40 minutes and is worth 25 points. As with the exercises, a quiz may be taken as many as three times with the highest score being recorded.

Tests: Three 50-minute tests are scheduled for the class hour. Each lasts 50 minutes and is worth 100 points.

Points missed on the tests will be added to the final exam. For example, if you earned 60 points on each test then to the final exam of 240 points would be added $3 \times 40 = 120$ points. If 60% of your answers on the final exam were correct, then the point score on the final exam recorded for you would be $0.60(240 + 120) = 216$ pts.

The point break down is	10 homeworks	60 points
	35 checks	70 points
	10 R. exercises	80 points
	2 quizzes	50 points
	3 tests	300 points
	Final exam	240 points
	TOTAL	800 points

There is a predetermined curve for the grades in this course based upon the final percentage out of 750 points: A's 100 to 85, B's 84 – 70, C's 69 – 55, D's 54 – 40, E below 40.

Example II (small lecture)

All students are expected to attend the weekly discussion sessions, held in the evening. There will be assignments involving some research and thinking, and including some short essays, due almost every Monday. These will include, for example, discussions of Watson's *Double Helix* and a "book report" on a novel.

Additional assignments:

1. Quizzes: Nine potential quiz dates are listed; 4 to 5 quizzes will be given using some of these assigned days. All quiz grades except your lowest one will be averaged. The purpose of the quizzes is to encourage you to keep up on the reading, to learn specific information, and to test your ongoing knowledge. The questions will be quite specific, based on information as presented in lecture and assigned reading. Quizzes will test for recently acquired knowledge, and will be cumulative for up to the preceding six classes (including the reading for the Thursday of the quiz). Sometimes, questions on quizzes that are based on the assigned reading may anticipate topics that will immediately be discussed in lecture. It is a good idea to take the quizzes seriously; there are no hour exams.
2. Final Exam will also be primarily objective, and it will be inclusive for the entire course. There may be a few questions requiring thought on the exam. One purpose of the final is to encourage you to synthesize your knowledge of the course material into an overall understanding of biology.

Grading:

The quizzes count 30%,
the final exam 30%,
and your writing, discussion, and participation in class and especially in the discussion sections counts the remaining 40%.

Example III (large lab)

Lab reports are expected to be handed in on time and directly to the TA – lab reports should not be left in TA's mailbox. Late lab reports (except in cases of illness and family emergency) are penalized at 5% off each late class day (i.e., Fri → Mon = 1 day off) so that:

1 class day late -5% (i.e., max. possible is 95/100) 2 class days late -10% (max is 90/100)

Grades will be determined based on exams, lab reports, the special writing assignments, and over-all performance in the laboratory.

- There will be two exams in lab lecture. The first exam is worth 7% and the second 13% of the grade.
- Lab reports are very important and constitute 70% of the grade.
- The special writing assignments are worth a total of 5% of the grade.
- In class presentation on "Genomes, Genes, and Disease" and over-all performance is worth 5% of the grade.

Guidelines for Grading the Writing Assignment:

For the Introduction:

1) Needs Improvement

2) Satisfactory

3) Excellent

I. Overall Organization and Effectiveness:

-Distribution of material into 3 “sections” is clear and appropriate	1	2	3
-Results presented clearly and accurately	1	2	3
-Demonstrates to the reader a good understanding of the experiment	1	2	3

II. Writing Skills:

-Language is clear and grammatically correct	1	2	3
-Language is concise	1	2	3
-Verb mood is consistent	1	2	3
-Use of tense is appropriate	1	2	3

Total Introduction Score: _____

For the Abstract:

I. Overall Organization and Effectiveness:

-Distribution of material into 4 “sections” is clear and appropriate	1	2	3
-Results presented clearly and accurately	1	2	3
-Demonstrates to the reader a good understanding of the experiment	1	2	3

II. Writing Skills

-Language is clear and grammatically correct	1	2	3
-Language is concise	1	2	3
-Verb mood is consistent	1	2	3
-Use of tense is appropriate	1	2	3

Total Abstract Score: _____

Examples from Social Science Courses:

Example I (large lecture)

Grading

The various course requirements are worth the following proportions of your final grade:

First Midterm Exam	20%
Second Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	
Part 1 (last third)	20%
Part 2 (cumulative)	20%
Total	40%
Activity Reports	20%

Final grades will be distributed according to the following modified curve:

The top 20-25% of the class will receive A- 's or higher. Transforming all grades into a possible 100 points, I will then count down 10 points from the A- cutoff; this will be the B- cutoff. The C- cutoff will be 15 points below that, and the D cutoff will be 15 points below that. Within each grade range (A range, B range, C range, D range), I will split the total set of scores into thirds to get +s and -s.

Example II (medium seminar)

Group Case Study on WebCT	15%
Small Written Assignments	10%
Lesson Plan/s (writing and feedback)	20%
Child Observations/journals	15%
“Who is a Good Teacher?” or “What is a Good School”?	15%
Group Report on School Observ.	15%
Class participation/attendance*	10%