

CRTE Teaching Matters Workshop

On Grading Effectively and Efficiently

Clearly Communicate Your Expectations: While telling students what assignments they need to complete and their point value, it is also important to make it clear what facts, ideas, events, and points-of-view they will need to understand throughout the course.

- Check that assignments and expectations are clear. This will make student submissions easier to grade because you have already outlined what you expect.
- Have students explain back to you what you are asking for on a given assignment.
- To check if your written instructions are clear, let someone from a different specialty or department read them.
- Model the kind of work you want. Show students samples of past student work or your own made-up examples; work through a sample with them in class. For smaller assignments, model good responses and answers every time you work through practice problems. Explain as you go why you are rephrasing what they say, and why one would be more correct, or earn more points on an exam.

A Rubric: Part of communicating effectively with your students about coursework expectations is having a rubric (a list of factors in a grade). Make the rubric available to them while they are working on the assignment and *explain how to use it*. Rubrics can take different forms and students may not be familiar with how to best use them to achieve their desired grade.

The Nuts and Bolts of Grading: Before you grade your first assignments check the following:

- Are there any departmental guidelines or standards about grading?
- Will other TAs for your course be grading the same assignment; what should be used as criteria for grading? Have you standardized?
- Before you look at the first paper/project/assignment, determine your criteria.
- What exactly are you looking for? Does the question explicitly ask for that?
- Will you be grading the student on process or the finished product?
- Is getting the problem right as important as making a good case for their answer?
- Will you be concerned with grammatical errors and writing style as much as content?
- Will there be partial credit for wrong answers to problem sets?

Many of these are good questions to ask *as the assignment is being created, before* it has been passed out to the students. Grading is much easier if it has been factored into the process of making an assignment (i.e. don't ask 5 questions for 4 points!).

Time Management

- You don't need to give a full explanation on why one answer is wrong and another correct; use key words that will guide students to the right answer as they go back through the material. This will save you time *and* helps them learn.
- Identify common problems students had with an assignment and prepare a handout addressing those problems. This helps you to avoid having to write the same comments multiple times. This helps you to address the problem in more detail and helps the students to realize that others share the same problems. You can also go over common problems in discussion section as a class.
- Type your comments. This has a number of advantages: it allows you to keep a computer record of the student's progress over the semester, comments can be more detailed, longer comments on common problems can be cut and pasted from one assignment to another, and it is easier for the student to read what you have written.

CRTE Teaching Matters Workshop

On Grading Effectively and Efficiently

- Do not comment on every problem or point. Focus on a couple of major points.
(Remember: what is the point of this assignment?) This not only helps you to grade more efficiently, it also avoids overwhelming the students. It enables them to focus more effectively on areas of their work in need of improvement.
- Use a spreadsheet to calculate grades. It may take a little time to learn how to use spreadsheet programs for grading if you are not familiar with them, but the savings in time can be considerable if you are working with grade points or weighted letter grades. You can also upload grades from spreadsheets directly to CROPS if in the correct format.
- Don't waste time on careless student work.