**Grading: Providing feedback while maintaining your sanity**

**Abstract**

When you look at the student assignments you need to grade, do you envision the hours it will take to provide comments and correct errors? Do you wonder if students will read your feedback and continue to make the same mistakes? Do traditional methods of grading increase student learning? And if they do not, or do so only marginally, why do we keep going through this tortuous ritual? This interactive session will introduce and allow you to practice techniques that will reduce the time you spend grading while still providing students with necessary feedback to facilitate learning.

**Introduction:**

Instructors want and need to provide students with useful feedback, but the time demands of grading non-objective work, especially when an instructor has a large number of students, is formidable. This session will introduce some grading methods instructors can use that will provide students with useful feedback and help them improve while allowing the instructor to spend less time grading.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications:**

Meta-analysis has confirmed that timely and useful feedback is a key part of student learning. A number of studies, however, revealed that students are often unsatisfied with the feedback they receive on written work; the primary reasons cited are feedback is insufficient, only negative feedback is given, there is no guidance about improvement, the feedback is difficult to understand, and the feedback given erodes confidence and self-esteem (Carless, 2006; Holmes &Smith, 2003). Thus, faculty members feel they are spending an inordinate amount of time grading and providing comments, and students largely find the feedback is not helpful.

*Rubrics:*

Rubrics are helpful when grading because they articulate expectations to students, make judgments more uniform, and feedback is part of the scales. Many instructors are familiar with only the analytical rubric, but there are also holistic rubrics and checklists.

*Analytical rubrics* list the criteria for an assignment and present a descriptive grading scale of three-five anchors for each criterion. It breaks assessment of student work into components, which are each graded separately and then added for the final score (Tips to…, 2017).

An alternative to the analytical rubric is the *holistic rubric*. The holistic rubric describes the overall performance for each possible grade, and the student product is considered as a whole. It allows faster grading than an analytical rubric (Tips to….,2017).

A third possibility is the *grading checklist*. Karmadis (n.d.) maintained that many instructors intuitively know the grade the student should receive and manipulate rubric points assigned on each criteria to add up to that score. She developed the grading checklist, which eliminates the need for multiple comments on a paper and doing mathematical calculations on a rubric. The checklist contains a list of criteria for the paper, including content, writing style, mechanics, etc. Each criterion that is done well or needs improvement is marked; acceptable work is not marked. The instructor uses her own schema to decide the final grade.

Any of these three tools has feedback built into the scales; the instructor needs only to mark the appropriate level of performance. In addition, it is useful if the teacher adds brief comments at the end that indicate what the student did exceptionally well and what needs to be worked on for the next paper (Holmes & Smith, 2003).

In addition to using a rubric, there are other considerations when grading including the extent to which student errors are corrected, the possibility of breaking the grading into smaller chunks, and the choice of grading hardcopy or electronic submissions.

*To correct or not to correct…that is the question.*

Too many instructors spend too much time giving feedback that isn’t useful, doesn’t lead to student learning, and doesn’t motivate students to do better on the next paper.

First, instructors should remember the difference between giving feedback and copyediting. Some correct every grammatical and punctuation error and rewrite sentences - this takes a lot of time and students typically don’t learn from these kinds of corrections. One teacher has a “three strikes and you are out” rule. If the same kind of error is made three times, he stops grading and gives the paper back to the student to fix. An alternative is to give the paper back if errors appear excessive during the first several paragraphs. This method will eliminate the need to grade poorly written papers, which generally take more time. The student has a better chance of learning if she must find and correct her own errors rather than having them corrected for her. The teacher maintains that once a student has to redo a paper, future papers come in with higher quality writing (Truby, 2014).

Secondly, resist the temptation to write in correct answers. If homework or assignments are reviewed in class, simply use a yellow highlighter to where there is a problem with the answer, and make it the student’s responsibility to find the correct answer.

An education professor described “the four-in-one rule”, which is a useful technique to use when a class has a large number of homework assignments or papers. If, for instance, a class has 12 homework assignments, collect and grade three over the course of the semester (without notice about which ones will be graded). Alternatively, collect all, grade three and simply check the others for credit/no credit. Students will put effort into all assignments because they don’t know which ones will be graded (Alber, 2010).

*Chunking Techniques*

1. Break tests or assignments into chunks. Correct the first page of all tests, then the second, etc. This will keep an instructor consistent in evaluation, it eliminates the need reset the mind for each student’s work, and once the first page is flipped, the student become anonymous and biases are eliminated.

For research papers, an instructor can grade for content first and then go back and grade for writing, formatting, etc. It is a more focused approach and may take less time than trying to do it all at once (Chtena, 2014)

2. If the assignment is complex or long, students can turn in a section at a time. It won’t take long to give feedback, and the next time, the student turns in the corrected portion and the next section.

3. An instructor can give students a choice of writing assignments and have them due on different days. This won’t reduce grading time, but it will help with monotony and there won’t be a full class of papers coming in at the same time (Truby, 2014).

*Hardcopy vs. Electronic Submissions*

Faculty teaching face-to-face or mixed delivery classes have the option of having students submit written assignments in the traditional hardcopy format or submit them online. The choice is often a personal one. It is easy to circle, highlight, or otherwise mark hardcopy. There is no need to have internet access or download student papers. Many people find it easier on the eyes to read from paper than a computer screen.

On the other hand, electronic submission allows for use of plagiarism detection programs such as SafeAssign or Turnitin. It also provides proof of when an assignment was actually submitted. Various Learning Management Systems (LMS) allow instructors to build rubrics to assist in grading. Even without adding rubrics to your LMS, you can still create a file with common feedback/comments for an assignment to allow you to cut and paste feedback to students instead of rewriting/typing your comments on every paper.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To have participants become familiar with some tools/techniques that will help make grading more manageable.
2. To give participants the opportunity to practice using some of these tools.
3. To discuss and exchange ideas about other time-saving methods participants have used.

**Session Description:**

Total time requested: 90 minutes allocated as follows:

Introductions: 10 minutes

After a brief introduction of the presenters, attendees will be asked to introduce themselves and share their usual approach to and biggest concerns/difficulties with grading.

Overview of grading techniques: 20 minutes

Brief overview of analytic rubrics, holistic rubrics, and checklists in general as well as the specific ones to be used in grading the sample assignment.

Grading of sample assignment: 20 minutes

Participants will break into groups of three. Working individually, each participant will grade a sample assignment using one of the three grading techniques. In the small groups, participants will discuss the time it took to grade the assignment, the quality of the feedback provided, and advantages/disadvantages of each technique.

Large group debrief and discussion: 40 minutes

Groups will share their results and presenters will lead a discussion of the time involved and their experience for each technique as well as other considerations when grading (i.e., Grading vs. copyediting, chunking, grading online). Participants will be encouraged to share their own techniques for good grading practices.

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