Grading & Feedback in Your Online Course

Prompt grading of online course assignments and providing constructive feedback to your online students can be challenging and also take so much time! After spending much time and effort in preparing feedback, how can you be sure that your students will read -- and heed -- your detailed comments and feedback?

In this issue of Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we'll review some tips & strategies for effective and efficient grading & feedback, including use of Blackboard tools, rubrics, audio & video feedback, self-grading, and specifications grading. We'll also list some ideas to make sure that your students read, understand & process your feedback, including "Delaying the Grade".

Try These Ideas for Effective & Efficient Grading & Feedback!
(Click on each link below to learn more)

Customize the Blackboard Grade Center. Customize your Blackboard Grade Center for clarity and efficiency for your grading and feedback. You can hide and reorder gradebook columns & rows; you can create grading categories; you can color-code the grade data. Watch **Video: How to Customize the Grade Center**.

Use Blackboard Rubrics for Consistency & Efficiency. Rubrics can help make grading more efficient & consistent. Watch **Video: Grade Using a Rubric in Blackboard**.

Enhance Feedback Using Audio or Video. Use technology (*e.g.*, audio-visual tools) to create & communicate engaging, personalized feedback to students. As shared by Mason faculty member Dr. Jered Borup (CEHD) **in his blog post**, video messaging and feedback from instructors can help reduce isolation of learners during social distancing (Borup, 2020). Additional guidelines for using videos for feedback and communication in asynchronous online & blended learning are found **in this paper by West *et al*. 2017**.

Use Self-Grading for Online Discussions. Use reflective learning to empower your students by having them self-score their own discussion posts. Students can reflect on their discussion posts using **Student Self-Reflection Guide for Online Discussions** (Association of College and University Educators, **Online Teaching Toolkit**).

Try Specifications Grading. In this grading approach, instructor defines specifications for satisfactory work (Nilson & Stanny, 2015). Students then are graded pass/fail on bundles of assignments that they choose to complete. Students must complete all assignments within a bundle at satisfactory level per the specifications. Bundles of assignments are associated with specific course letter grades.

"Delaying the Grade". Students first review your comments and must respond back to you with questions and reflections on the assignment, before you share grades. This allows a focus on the comments and feedback, as well as plans for improvement, before the grade is revealed (Loudon, 2017). See next page for more info on how you might use "Delaying the Grade" in online course.

How Can You Make Sure that Your Online Students Are Reading Your Feedback?

Do Students Know Where to Find Your Feedback?

Students may not be reading your feedback because they don't know where to find it in the online course. Make sure that your students know where to find your feedback in the **Blackboard My Grades**. Share **Video: Check your grades** If you post feedback in another location within the Blackboard course, let them know where to find the feedback.

Share this information with your students about **"How to View Your Grades and Instructor Feedback"** (ITS, Blackboard Knowledge Base, George Mason University).

How Can You Get Students to Focus (More) on Your Comments & Feedback, Not Just the Grade?

Try using the technique **"Delaying the Grade"** (Louden, 2017) in which students first must review your comments and then respond back to you with questions, reflecting on their assignment. Only after this dialogue with each student, you will post and share assignment grades. This technique provides a dialogue between teacher & student to promote learning and improvement. Be selective using this approach, *e.g.,* use for paper proposals & plans, scaffolded assignments. In an online course, you might use the Blackboard Journal function for students to post such "delayed graded" assignments. Using Journals, you and each student then may have an online space for learner-instructor dialogue, before sharing the grade.

Learn More about Grading & Feedback

- Nilson, L.B. & Stanny, C.J. (2015). *Specifications grading: restoring rigor, motivating students, and saving faculty time* (First edition). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. <Available from Mason Libraries>
- Louden, K. (2017). **Delaying the grade: How to get students to read feedback.** Cult of Pedagogy. Accessed 29 Sept 2020.
- West, R., Jay, J., Armstrong, M., & Borup, J. (2017). Picturing them right in front of me": Guidelines for implementing video communication in online and blended Learning. TechTrends, 61(5), 461–469. **https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-017-0208-y** <Available from Mason Libraries>
- Borup, J. (2020). **Avoiding isolation during social distancing**. EdTech. Accessed 29 Sept 2020.

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