

Specifications Grading: *Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time*

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Participant Outcomes

- Articulate criteria for evaluating a grading system.
- Critically evaluate our predominant system of grading against these criteria.
- Explain how a new grading system, *specifications (specs) grading*, works.
- Implement this system in your own courses.

Criteria of an “Ideal” Grading System

- Upholds high academic standards
- Grade reflects students' achievement of outcomes
- Students know what is expected of them
- Rewards higher-order cognitive thinking and creativity
- Motivates students to learn and do excellent work
- Makes students feel responsible for their grades
- Minimizes student-faculty conflict (e.g., grade protests)
- Minimizes student and faculty stress
- Gives students feedback they use
- Saves faculty time
- Discourages cheating
- Fosters high inter-rater agreement

***On which criterion does our
current grading system
perform well?***

Perform poorly?



A New Gestalt

Element #1

■ **Pass/Fail grading of assignments & tests – like competency-based educ and:**

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Davidson, C. (2009, May 3). Getting out of grading. *Inside Higher Ed*.
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/08/03/grading>.

Kulik, C., Kulik, J., & Bangert-Drowns, R. (1990). Effectiveness of mastery learning programs: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educ Research*, 60(2), 265-306.

Kunkel, S.W. (2002). Consultant learning: A model for student-directed learning in management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 26(2), 121-138.

Leff, L.L. (n.d.). Contract grading in teaching computer programming.
<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mflll/GRADCONT.HTM>

Venditti, P. (2010, June 10). Re: End of semester sanity strategies? Post to POD listserv archived at <https://listserv.nd.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind1006&L=POD&T=0&F=&S=&P=67803>

Elements #1 & #2

■ **Pass/Fail grading of assignments & tests**



■ **Tokens (virtual)**



How Do You Wind up with Final Letter Grades?

- **Point system:** Each passed test or assignment = N points (all or nothing)
of points at end = A, B, C, D, or F
- ***Or Bundles/Modules***

Bundles and Course Grades

Higher grades for:

- Demonstrating mastery of ***more*** content and/or skills *OR*
- Demonstrating mastery of ***more complex, higher-level*** content and/or skills *OR*
- Demonstrating both

Elements #1, #2, and #3

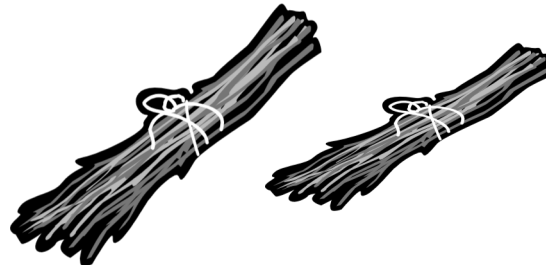
■ **Pass/Fail grading of assignments & tests**



■ **Tokens**



■ **Bundles**



10-Bundle Model

- For a D, students have to complete bundles 1 through 5.
- For a C, they have to complete bundles 1 through 7.
- For a B, they have to complete bundles 1 through 8.
- For an A, they have to complete all 10 bundles.

4-Bundle Model

- For a D, students have to complete only the easiest & most basic bundle.
- For a C, they have to complete that basic bundle + a more challenging one.
- For a B, they have to complete these 2 bundles + an even more challenging 3rd one.
- For an A, they have to complete all 4 bundles, where the 4th is the most challenging one.

3 Synthetic/Hybrid Models

For D: average 60-69% on exams

For C: average 70% or higher on exams

For B: C requ'ts & complete a group project

For A: B requ'ts & complete an individual paper

For C: successfully complete Module 1

For B: C requ'ts & Module 2

For A: B requ'ts & score $\geq 90\%$ on Module 3

For C: average 70% or higher on exams

For B: C requ'ts & bundle of assignments

For A: B requ'ts & score $\geq 90\%$ on final exam

For Online or Blended Classes

For C: average $\geq 70\%$ on non-proctored exams

For B: C requ'ts & average $\geq 80\%$ on add'l assignments

For A: B requ'ts & average $\geq 90\%$ on advanced material; **OR** B requ'ts & score $\geq 90\%$ on proctored final

Faculty are using specs grading at:

**Augusta University
Clemson University
Dalton State University
Embry-Riddle University,
Prescott, AZ
Florida Southwestern State
College
Greenville Technical
College
Hobart and William Smith
Colleges
Indiana University
Kennesaw State Univ.**

**Kent State University
McGill University (Canada)
Monroe Community
College
North Carolina State Univ.
Northern Arizona Univ.
Point Loma Nazarene Univ.
Simmons University
University of Utah
Wilfred Laurier University
(Canada)
Xavier University**