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.

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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:

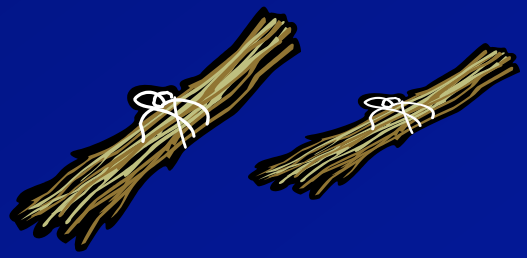
- Demonstrating mastery of ***more*** content and/or skills *OR*
- Demonstrating mastery of ***more complex, higher-level*** content and/or skills *OR*
- Demonstrating both

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 ≥ 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 ≥ 90% on final exam

For Online or Blended Classes

For C: average ≥ 70% on non-proctored exams

For B: C requ'ts & average ≥ 80% on add'l assignments

For A: B requ'ts & average ≥ 90% on advanced material; ***OR*** B requ'ts & score ≥ 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