

Strategies and tips for handling grading in a larger course

Design good assignments

- Assign shorter papers that are more focused on particular tasks, such as constructing an argument or using evidence to support and argument.
- Select topics for students, rather than asking them to come up with their own.
- Short writing assignments can be just as challenging to students as longer ones. Ask students to write using brief forms, such as the “six-word memoir”, a precis, a tweet, or even a visual form. Ask students to free-write to a prompt and then edit to a shorter form that you then read.

Save yourself some time prior to grading

- Develop task-specific rubrics. If you use Canvas, use these rubrics in Speed Grader.
- Show students examples of high (and low) quality work. Hold an in-class norming session in which groups of students read these examples and reach consensus on their relative ranking.
- Rushed work is rarely high quality work. Incorporate a peer review activity to encourage students to complete drafts of papers ahead of time.
- Ask students to complete and sign a procedural checklist (paper stapled, font guidelines met, length guidelines met, etc.) and require it for assignment submission. This will help them to double-check that all formatting guidelines have been followed.
- Utilize student knowledge by asking students to preface work they hand in with a self-evaluation. For example, ask students to comment on the strongest and weakest parts of their work.
- Do not waste time on careless student work. Ask students to complete a checklist that shows they have checked for low-level errors.
- Utilize your campus writing center/tutors. Encourage students to ask them to be first readers of a writing assignment.
- You do not have to provide feedback to all students at all times. Stagger due dates for larger projects. If your course has a series of short, low-stakes assignments, grade a sample. Students can deliver oral presentations via video, which you can view and score outside of class time.

Bump up your grading efficiency

- Use only as many grade levels as you need. Ask yourself what makes the most sense for each assignment – do you really need 13 levels (A-F, including +/-), or would a four-level system work better (check, check plus, check minus, no check)? Smaller assignments can even be graded as complete or incomplete.
- Do not comment on every issue or error. Instead, focus on a few major points related to the purpose of the assignment. For example, if the main purpose of a given assignment is for students to make quality inferences from raw data, comment only on that issue in their work.
- If you need to comment on common lower-level errors, mark 1-2 paragraphs, rather than the whole piece.
- Create boilerplate passages you can use for common errors in student work.
- Show examples of student work as part of your feedback.
- Comment on drafts only. Give final drafts a score with minimal comments.
- Record spoken comments on student work using software in Speed Grader. You can use Zoom to type or record comments on student written work or oral presentations.

Plan ahead for student complaints

- Establish a 24/7 policy for grade complaints – students must wait 24 hours before making a claim for a higher grade, but they must make this claim within 7 days of receiving the assignment back. This allows for both a cooling off period and a limit to the amount of time grades can stay open.
- If students request a re-grade, ask for the student to write a paragraph explaining why they deserve a different score. This can reduce spurious re-grading requests.

Sources:

Bahls, Patrick. (2012) *Student Writing in the Quantitative Disciplines: A Guide for College Faculty*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

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