

Grading Principles

Research continues to accumulate regarding grading practices. This research in combination with standards-based practice requires educators to examine and question how and why we grade both as individuals and as a collective group. At CLI, we encourage Curriculum Coordinating Councils, Subject Area Committees, building faculties, and individual teachers to begin to take a hard look at what “we’ve always done” with grading and compare this to what research says is best for students, parents, and teachers.

The following eight guidelines for grading are paraphrased from the practical and user-friendly book *How to Grade for Learning – Linking Grades to Standards*, 2nd edition, by Ken O’Connor. This book narrows down complicated, fuzzy grading issues into eight clear principles and then devotes a chapter to the details of each principle. We recommend the book as a great place to begin (or continue) your journey into questioning grading practices — either individually or as a learning team.

Guidelines for Grading in Outcomes-Based Systems to Support Learning and to Encourage Student Success

- 1. Relate grading procedures to learning goals (i.e., outcomes).**
 - a) Use learning goals (outcomes) as the basis for grade determination.
 - b) Record assessment grades under each learning goal. Do not use types of assessments (finals, quizzes, etc.) as the categories themselves.
- 2. Use criterion-referenced performance outcomes as reference points to determine grades.**
 - a) The meaning of grades (letters or numbers) should come from clear descriptions of the performance related to each outcome.
 - b) If students hit the goal, they get the grade! (i.e., NO bell curve).
- 3. Limit the valued attributes included in grades to individual achievement.**
 - a) Grades should be based on achievement (i.e., demonstration of the knowledge and skill components of the outcomes). Effort, participation, attitude, and other behaviors should be reported separately.
 - b) Grades should be based on individual achievement – no group grades.
- 4. Sample student performance – do not include all scores in grades.**
 - a) Provide *feedback* on formative performance – use words, rubrics, or checklists.
 - b) Include information only from varied summative assessments in grades.

- 5. Grade in pencil – keep records so they can be updated easily.**
 - a) Use the most consistent level of achievement with special consideration for the more recent information.
 - b) Provide several assessment opportunities (varying in method and number).

- 6. Crunch numbers carefully – if at all.**
 - a) Avoid using the mean; consider using the median or mode.
 - b) Weight components to achieve intent in final grades.

- 7. Use quality assessment(s) and properly recorded evidence of achievement.**
 - a) Meet standards for quality assessment (clear targets, clear purpose, appropriate target-method match, appropriate sampling, and avoidance of bias and distortion).
 - b) Record and maintain evidence of achievement (portfolios, conferences, tracking sheets, etc.).

- 8. Discuss and involve students in assessment, including grading, throughout the teaching/learning process.**