

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course: Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice

Presenters: Kristine Nielsen and Douglas B. Reeves

Credits: 3 Graduate Credits

Required eBook: *Elements of Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice* (Douglas Reeves, Solution Tree Press, 2011)

Course Overview

Grading has a profound impact both on students' futures and on how and what they learn, and yet traditional grading is marred by undue influences and questionable practices. In this course, participants learn from workshop, classroom, and interview footage to assess their grading and feedback for accuracy, fairness, specificity, and timeliness. They explore ways to improve their feedback to students during the learning process. Finally, they question some customary practices—including not distinguishing academic from behavioral issues, giving mathematically imprecise zeros, and grading the process rather than the product—and consider elegant and efficient alternatives to affect student engagement and achievement.

Presenters' Bios

Dr. Kris Nielsen works with schools nationally and internationally on issues of school improvement, assessment, instructional strategies, planning, and the effective use of data to improve school processes and instruction. She coaches principals and teachers in effective planning and in quality implementation of research-based practices. Dr. Nielsen's experience includes tenure as the Executive Director of the Minnesota Administrators Leadership Forum, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She has also been a high school administrator, a preK-12 staff development director, an elementary Title 1 and gifted/talented coordinator, and a teacher of English, language arts, composition, and humanities. Dr. Nielsen's doctorate is in educational policy and administration.

Dr. Douglas Reeves is founder of the Leadership and Learning Center. He is a frequent keynote speaker for education, business, nonprofit, and government organizations throughout the world. The author of more than twenty books and many articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, he has twice been selected for the Harvard Distinguished Authors Series. He was named the 2006 Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. He also received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Parents' Choice Award for his writing for children and parents.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, educators will know:

- Methods for revising existing grading systems to provide feedback and grades that are:
 - Accurate



- Fair
- Specific
- Timely
- Strategies for improving feedback

Student Learning Outcomes

- After completing this course, educators will apply the following skills:
- Analyze and revise their current grading practices
- Render grades and feedback accurate, fair, specific, and timely

Unit 1: Introduction to Grading Practices

In this unit, presenters Doug Reeves and Kris Nielsen establish context for the course by exploring the importance of grades and their potential impact on students. With the workshop participants, they establish grades as a means to track students' growth and progress and to indicate what students need, even while they look into what influences and sometimes distorts grades.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The impact of grades
- What influences grades

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Monitor and manage what is influencing their grades, including bias and a failure to distinguish academic from behavioral issues

Text: eBook: "Introduction"

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 2: Facilitating Change

In this unit, Reeves and Nielsen invite the workshop and online participants to consider how their grading practices have and/or should evolve based on the consequences of personal experience, collective experience, systematic observation, and the preponderance of evidence.

Unit Objective



After completing this unit, educators will know:

- What affects—and should affect—changes in practice

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Explore the impact of belief, personal experience, collective experience, systematic observation, and preponderance of evidence on their grading practice

Texts: eBook: “Grading is Feedback” and “The Grading Debate”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 3: Feedback and Formative Assessment

In this unit, the presenters discuss grading as feedback—grades’ most essential function—pursuing with participants how to improve their practice in relation to using feedback to help students assess their process, progress, and product and raise student achievement. They consider what constitutes accuracy in grades and means of distinguishing academic from behavioral factors. Classroom footage illustrates and extends this unit’s content.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The functions of feedback
- Methods for providing accurate feedback and grades
- When to apply grades to student work

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Employ effective feedback to impact student achievement

Texts: eBook: “How to Improve Accuracy” and “How to Improve Fairness”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.



Unit 4: Fairness and Specificity

In this unit, the presenters shift from how to make grades accurate to how to make them fair and specific. They ask questions about how a teacher’s scaffolding affects grades, how parent involvement does, and whether standards should be modified for different students. Nielsen presents Reeve’s simple system for a standards-based report card that provides a student and his or her parents with precise information about what a student knows and is able to do—and needs to focus on next.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- What makes grades fair
- What makes grades specific
- A simple standards-based report card

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Conduct “reality checks” to assess the effectiveness of their grading
- Provide fair grades
- Provide specific grades and feedback

Texts: eBook: “How to Improve Specificity” and “How to Improve Timeliness”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 5: Timeliness and Students’ Role

The presenters and participants address timeliness in this unit, exploring how to give students feedback immediately and efficiently to directly affect their process and progress. Participants address the question of the relationship between grades and the “real world,” and how to involve students in their own assessment. Classroom examples illustrate this unit’s themes.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- What makes grades and feedback timely
- The role of students in their own assessment

Student Learning Outcomes



After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Render grades and feedback timely
- Involve students in assessment

Text: eBook: “Time-Saving Strategies for Busy Teachers”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 6: Breaking the Rules

In this unit, participants face head-on such controversial issues as whether to assign zeros or grade homework. They discuss the degree to which grades are used as discipline and whether that use is appropriate. They also scrutinize the provocative truth that “A” students and “D” students tend to be distinguishable less by how much they are learning than by their behavior and ability to “play school.”

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The problem with zeros
- The debate on grading homework

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Carefully consider their use of zeros and the appropriateness of grading homework
- Find substitutes for zeros
- Avoid using grades as disciplinary tools
- Analyze what makes students high or low grade earners

Methods of Instruction

- Videos (presentations consisting of lecture, interviews, and classroom footage)
- Readings
- Reflection questions (open-ended questions at intervals throughout the video presentations where participants are asked to reflect on the course content, their own practice, and their intentions for their practice)
- Quizzes (selected-response quizzes to assess understanding of the video presentations)
- Discussion forum (prompts after each unit that engage participants in online dialogue with their cohorts)



- Midterm (a project intended to get teachers to begin to develop their practice by putting to work in the classroom what they have learned)
- Final (a project that enables educators to reflect on their practice and assess their students' work through the lens of what they have learned)

Plagiarism Policy

KDS recognizes plagiarism as a serious academic offense. Plagiarism is the passing off of someone else's work as one's own and includes failing to cite sources for others' ideas, copying material from books or the Internet (including lesson plans and rubrics), and handing in work written by someone other than the participant. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and may have additional consequences. For more information about plagiarism and guidelines for appropriate citation, consult plagiarism.org.

Percentage of Course Credit

- Reflection questions 25%
- Quizzes 15%
- Midterm 25%
- Final 35%

In order to complete the requirements of the course, the participant must complete all course work (e.g., reflections, quizzes, and any midterm and/or final), including watching all videos and participating in all discussion forums. We do not award partial credit.

Grading Policy

A: 3.4 – 4.0
B: 2.7 – 3.3
C: 2.0 – 2.6
F: >2.0



Reflection/Quiz Rubric

Activity	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
Quizzes	90-100%	80-89%	70-79%	69% or below
Reflection Question	<p>Participant has provided rich detail and supporting examples from the course content.</p> <p>Participant has made responses to prompts personally meaningful and relevant to his or her teaching practice.</p>	<p>Participant has included appropriate content from the course content.</p> <p>Participant has made thoughtful comments in direct response to the prompts.</p>	<p>Participant has included little that indicates consideration and comprehension of course content.</p> <p>Participant has answered most questions directly but some too briefly.</p>	<p>Participant has included little to no content indicating consideration and comprehension of course content.</p> <p>Participant has not addressed the specific questions posed.</p> <p>Participant has not responded to all reflection questions.</p> <p>Participant has copied from the course transcript without synthesis or analysis.</p>

Midterm

For this midterm assignment, you will collect five samples of students' work that you have recently graded—including samples of work that received very low grades and ones that received very high grades--to honestly assess how effective you have been at providing feedback and an accurate grade for each sample.

Include a definition of “accurate” to provide context for your assessment. Also include specific evidence in your assessment of your grading. Finally, explain how you think you could make the grade more accurate and how you could provide more productive feedback.

Please do the following:

1. Collect five samples of students' work that earned a range of grades (from lowest to highest).
2. Define what it means for the grades to be “accurate.” Assess your grading of each sample for their accuracy based on your definition. Then assess the feedback that accompanies your grade for its potential usefulness to your students. Identify specific examples of feedback that you provided your students that you believe are particularly “useful.”
3. Explain how you could improve the accuracy of your grades.
4. Explain how you could make your feedback more productive.



Midterm Rubric

Step	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
Define what it means for the grades to be “accurate.” Assess your grading of each sample for their accuracy based on your definition.	Participant has defined in his or her own words the term “accuracy” in relation to grading and evaluated the grades on 5 samples of student work for that quality, noting where his or her accuracy could be improved and what accounts for its lack.	Participant has defined in his or her own words the term “accuracy” in relation to grading and evaluated the grades 5 samples of student work for that quality.	Participant has evaluated the grades on 3-4 samples of student work for accuracy, though he or she has not defined the term. He or she may also have misunderstood the term or copied the definition from the course transcript.	Participant has evaluated the grades on 0-2 samples of student work. He or she has not indicated comprehension of the term “accuracy.”
Assess the feedback that accompanies your grade for its potential usefulness to students. Illustrate your assessment with examples.	Participant has carefully and honestly assessed his or her feedback accompanying grades on the 5 samples for how useful it is likely to be to students. Participant has included appropriate examples to support his or her assessment.	Participant has assessed his or her feedback accompanying grades on the 4-5 samples for how useful it is likely to be to students. Participant has included examples to support his or her assessment.	Participant has assessed his or her feedback accompanying grades on 3-4 samples but not reached clear conclusions about how useful it is likely to be to students. Participant has not included enough examples to support his or her assessment.	Participant has not assessed his or her feedback accompanying grades on 0-2 samples. Or, participant has not included any examples to support his or her assessment. Or, participant has assessed fewer than 3samples.
Explain how you could improve the accuracy of your grades.	Participant has offered a clear and well-reasoned explanation as to how he or she could improve the grade’s accuracy. He or she has illustrated the explanation with specific and sound example(s).	Participant has explained how he or she could improve the grade’s accuracy. He or she has illustrated the explanation with an example.	Participant has only vaguely explained how he or she could improve the grade’s accuracy.	Participant has not explained how he or she could improve the grade’s accuracy.



<p>Explain how you could make your feedback more productive.</p>	<p>Participant has offered a clear and well-reasoned method for making his or her feedback more productive, incorporating specific examples to illustrate points.</p>	<p>Participant has explained how he or she could make feedback more productive. He or she has used an example to illustrate the point.</p>	<p>Participant has only vaguely explained how he or she could make feedback more productive.</p>	<p>Participant has not explained how he or she could make feedback more productive.</p>
<p>Formal issues</p>	<p>Participant has made no grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure and made careful word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made a few grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized most paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure though not always found the right word.</p>	<p>Participant has made some distracting grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized some paragraphs around main ideas but not others.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that communicates his or her thoughts but with no marked eloquence and insufficient attention to word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made multiple grammatical errors.</p> <p>Paragraphs are not organized around main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.</p>

Final

For your midterm you gathered five samples of student work and assessed the quality of your grading and feedback for accuracy and usefulness.

For your final, you will collect five more samples (again representing a range of grades) and assess your grades and feedback for fairness, specificity, and timeliness.

Please do the following:

1. Collect five samples of students' work that earned a range of grades.
2. Using your own words, define the terms "fairness", "specificity", and "timeliness" as they relate to the grading process.
3. Assess your grades for fairness, specificity, and timeliness. Include how you would improve your practice in these areas.
4. Explain how you provided feedback before assigning a grade. If you did not provide feedback, explain how you would do so in the future.



5. Explain how you incorporated students' self- or peer-assessment and with what outcomes. If you did not involve students in their assessment, speculate how you could do so in the future.
6. Write a paragraph reflecting on Dr. Reeves' assertion that "the grade without context is without much meaning."

Final Rubric

Step	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
<p>Using your own words define the terms "fairness", "specificity", and "timeliness" as they relate to the grading process.</p>	<p>Participant has clearly and succinctly defined in his or her own words the terms "fairness," "specificity," and "timeliness" in relation to grading and the definitions are directly in line with the content of the course.</p>	<p>Participant has defined in his or her own words the terms "fairness," "specificity," and "timeliness" in relation to grading and the definition aligns with the course content.</p>	<p>Participant has described the terms "fairness," "specificity," and "timeliness" in relation to grading, but the description is vague and/or not directly and clearly aligned to the content of the course.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant copied the definitions word for word from the course transcripts.</p>	<p>Participant has not defined these terms or the definition of the terms is not aligned to their use in grading and/or the content of the course.</p>
<p>Assess your grades for fairness, specificity, and timeliness. Include how you would improve your practice in these areas.</p>	<p>Participant has evaluated the grades on 5 samples of student work for each of these qualities, noting specific examples of where each could be improved and what counts for their lack.</p>	<p>Participant has evaluated the grades on 5 samples of student work for those qualities, identifying areas for improvement.</p>	<p>Participant has evaluated the grades on 3-4 samples of student work for fairness, specificity, and timeliness.</p> <p>Participant does not indicate how he or she would improve on these components in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has evaluated the grades on 0-2 samples of student work.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has evaluated grades on more than 2 samples of student work, but the evaluation is not aligned with the tenants of the course.</p>



<p>Explain how you provided feedback before assigning a grade. If you did not provide feedback, explain how you would in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has detailed with compelling examples how he or she provided feedback before assigning a grade.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has described a sound plan for incorporating high quality and appropriate feedback in the future, including details about what kinds of feedback that would be.</p>	<p>Participant has explained how he or she provided feedback with appropriate examples before assigning a grade.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has described a reasonable plan for incorporating feedback in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has explained how he or she provided feedback, but not before assigning a grade and/or without examples.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has offered a vague plan for incorporating feedback in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has not explained how he or she provided feedback before assigning a grade.</p> <p>Participant has not offered a plan for incorporating feedback in the future.</p>
<p>Explain how you incorporated students' self- or peer-assessment and with what effects. If you did not involve students in their assessment, speculate how you would in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has detailed how he or she incorporated students' self- or peer-assessment and with what effects, providing illustrative examples throughout.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has described a sound plan for involving students in the future, detailing both process and product.</p>	<p>Participant has explained how he or she incorporated students' self- or peer-assessment and with what effects.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has described a plan for involving students in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has indicated how he or she incorporated students' self- or peer-assessment though without enough detail to convince the reader of the utility or effectiveness of the process. Participant has only vaguely described the effects of doing so.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Participant has described a vague plan for involving students in the future.</p>	<p>Participant has not indicated how he or she incorporated students' self- or peer-assessment.</p> <p>Participant has not detailed the effects of doing so.</p> <p>Or, participant has not described a plan for involving students in the future.</p>



<p>Write a paragraph reflecting on Dr. Reeves' assertion that "the grade without context is without much meaning."</p>	<p>Participant has written a concise and precise paragraph reflecting on Dr. Reeves' assertion that "the grade without context is without meaning," appropriately elaborating on "context" and "meaning."</p>	<p>Participant has written a paragraph reflecting on Dr. Reeves' assertion that "the grade without context is without meaning."</p>	<p>Participant has written a paragraph reflecting on Dr. Reeves' assertion that "the grade without context is without meaning," but he or she has not indicated an understanding of the assertion.</p>	<p>Participant has not written a paragraph reflecting on Dr. Reeves' assertion that "the grade without context is without meaning."</p>
<p>Formal issues</p>	<p>Participant has made no grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure and made careful word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made a few grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized most paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure though not always found the right word.</p>	<p>Participant has made some distracting grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized some paragraphs around main ideas but not others.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that communicates his or her thoughts but with no marked eloquence and insufficient attention to word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made multiple grammatical errors.</p> <p>Paragraphs are not organized around main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.</p>