

Communicating Clear Grading Expectations and Designing Effective Grading Policies: Best Practices for Grading

The following are suggestions for faculty that represent best practices. While some of these best practices are required by the college (e.g., stating grading turnaround times in the syllabus), most of these are recommendations for effective teaching.

- **Indicate grading turnaround times in your syllabus. Constructive, ongoing feedback fosters learning.** A general turnaround time of two (2) weeks is best practice, although longer projects and papers can require more time, and shorter low-stakes assignments can be returned earlier when possible. Grades are a useful means of communicating to students the areas in which they are mastering course learning outcomes and those where they still require development.
- **Develop grading policies that are consistent and clear.** Make sure to align grading practices across the syllabus, Canvas grade book, and assignment instructions. Avoid deviating from this alignment, as faculty should assign grades in ways that cannot be construed as arbitrary or capricious, as defined by Collin College Grade Appeals Procedures.
- **Develop formative assignments that lead students towards achieving the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and content mastery** with low-stakes assignments that lead up to major assignments.
- **Distinguish if assignments will be graded based upon completion, accuracy, and/or a holistic approach, such as a rubric.** Clearly communicate grading methods for assignments on Canvas and/or in the assignment directions.
- **Feedback can be provided effectively through varied methods**, which include comments (written or audio/video), detailed rubrics, and/or one-on-one conferencing. Faculty should also be mindful about issues of accessibility in providing feedback (e.g., subtitles for video feedback, etc.).
- **Grant students the opportunity to ask questions**, during class, office hours, over the phone, or by email/Canvas message.
- **Rely on official channels of communication.** When communicating to students about grades or performance, use Collin College messaging systems or office hour meetings and always adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Avoid unofficial channels, such as personal email or text messages, to maintain security and student privacy.
- **Use class meeting times to thoroughly review the guidelines for assignments.** Students will have an opportunity to follow the instructions step-by-step and pose any questions that will aid their comprehension of the expectations. For online classes, instructors may accomplish a review through asynchronous means, such as pre-recorded lessons, lectures, or discussion boards.
- **Assist students by connecting assignments to Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Marketable Skills**, demonstrating their relevance and connection to potential careers, vocations, and future areas of study.
- **Craft grading policies that clearly outline the system that will be used to gauge student mastery of course learning outcomes.** Various forms range from alphabetical grades and percentage grades to points and labor-based grading contracts.
- **Define each grading category in the syllabus** (e.g., exams, projects, and participation). Indicate the point values or percentages for each in the Methods of Evaluation section of the syllabus.
- **Identify the major assignments in the syllabus**, offering a brief description for each. List the deadlines for all major assessments in the Course Calendar section of the syllabus.

- **Provide students easy access to recorded grades through the Canvas grade book**, which helps promote transparency.
- **Update grades regularly** to help students monitor their progress and stay engaged.
- **Create clear policies related to the acceptance and grading of assignments**, such as a thorough late work policy and procedures for submission. Indicate in the syllabus whether or not revisions, retakes, or extra credit are allowed.
- **Enter at least one assessment in the grade book prior to the census date, and at least one major grade prior to the course withdrawal deadline.** Major grades are typically 10% of the overall grade or higher.
- **Adhere to Collin College policies.** Account for special circumstances, documented accommodations, and standard policies (e.g., attendance, incompletes, and lateral transfers).
- **Avoid altering major assignments and methods of evaluation without reasonable cause and advanced notice.** So students clearly understand the course expectations for the semester, no major assignments (i.e., 10% of the grade or higher) should be added or removed. Likewise, a faculty member should not suddenly alter the percentages or number of points attached to a major assignment. Only unusual or unavoidable circumstances may justify large changes, and when those occur, instructors should take the proper steps to notify students and Associate Deans/Directors in writing, providing sufficient notice.
- **Outline attendance and/or participation expectations in the syllabus.** State whether or not these expectations factor into students' overall course grade. Should attendance and/or participation factor into students' course grades, clearly state the ways in which attendance and/or participation are crucial for meeting the course learning outcomes, course objectives, and/or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Even with clear expectations, it is good practice, and in certain cases, Board Policy and state law, to accommodate legitimate, documented circumstances that interfere with attendance. Faculty will also need to keep a record of student attendance and/or participation for census purposes and to indicate the last date of attendance for any students earning an F in the course.

Guidance on Attendance Policies:

Collin College expects that faculty implementing an attendance/absence course policy will create a policy statement for all classes that adheres to college policy and to Collin College's core values. Specifically, all attendance/absence course policies must excuse a student from attending class or other required activities, including examinations, for the following reasons that arise from state law, THECB rules, and Collin College Board Policies:

1. Observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose (Board Policy FC (LEGAL))
2. Required military service, including travel for that purpose (Board Policy FC (LEGAL)), including the maximum limit of how much class may be missed and still be eligible for faculty to work with each affected student.
3. Pregnancy and Parenting under Title IX (Board Policies FAA(LEGAL) and FAA(LOCAL))

Faculty are encouraged to build policies that work with students suffering from short-term illness or hospitalization to make up missed assignments via excused absences consistent with Collin College's core values or offering an incomplete if the requirements are met.

Faculty are encouraged to build policies that work with students experiencing a medical emergency or situations involving extenuating circumstances well beyond the student's control (i.e. death in the family, etc.) wherever possible. Finally, faculty are encouraged to reasonably accommodate students participating in an official College or High school sponsored-functions, or civic duties (i.e. jury duty). Faculty may request documentation from the student regarding any of these absences.

College Closures:

All faculty must honor scheduled, Board-approved institutional closures published in the academic calendar, as well as the published start and end dates for the academic term.

Class meeting, assignment, and/or exam due dates cannot be set on a date when campuses are closed by Board of Trustees approval (e.g. Spring Break, Thanksgiving, etc.) or beyond the formal start and end dates for the term/course. Exceptions may be requested by specific units of the college (campus, division, department, or program) through the appropriate administrative structure, and the requests must be approved by the SVPCO.

For unplanned, weather-related, or similar emergency campus closures, specific guidance or adjustments to ensure compliance with relevant scheduling policies will be provided to faculty as necessary via administrative communications. Faculty may continue to address specific student situations (e.g. incompletes, late withdrawals, etc.) in accordance with Collin College Policies and Procedures.