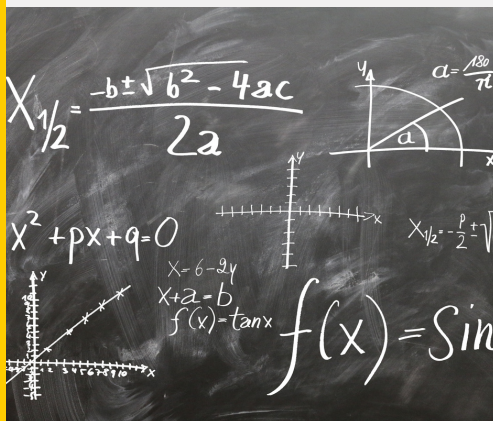


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Specification Grading

“How do you teach writing?” isn’t a question chemists often ask themselves. We ask ourselves “how do you grade the process of writing?” even less often. Yet, these were the two questions facing me when I began designing the chemistry department’s new chemical communication class.

...

Luckily, humanities professors have thought about these problems extensively, and I found specifications grading was the answer to my issues. **Specifications grading is a system of grading that sets clear expectations for each assignment, then each assignment either receives credit or not based on whether it meets those clearly laid out expectations.** These assignments and expectations are designed to align with the learning objectives of the course. Assignments are often grouped into units and meeting expectations in a certain number of units is used to determine letter grades. Grading on specifications allows me to maintain standards for a draft while allowing students to make mistakes and learn from them.

...

Needing to meet the specifications of an assignment has led students to think about their writing, their process, and the chemistry that underlies it. This engagement with the process has resulted in both better writers and better chemists.

[Read more](#)

Specification Grading in the Disciplines:
An account by WIP faculty member Jessica
Jensen, Lecturer in Chemistry. Fall 2022.

Contract Grading

"The contract helps strip away the mystification of institutional and cultural power in the everyday grades we give in our writing courses. Using the contract method over time has allowed us to see to the root of our discomfort: conventional grading rests on two principles that are patently false: that professionals in our field have common standards for grading, and that the “quality” of a multidimensional product can be fairly or accurately represented with a conventional one-dimensional grade" (p. 249).

"The basic principle in contract grading is simple but radical: what counts ('counts,' literally, for the grade) is going through the motions. That is, **contract grading focuses wholeheartedly on processes** whereas conventional grading focuses much more on products, outcomes, or results. With the flexibility of contracts, teachers can highlight those processes they value, thus allowing individual commitments. . .to be highlighted and built into the classroom experience. Furthermore, critical processes like revision and peer review that cannot be accounted for in conventional grading are easily integrated into contracts" (p. 260).

[Learn more](#)

Source: Danielewicz, J., & Elbow, P. (2009). A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(2), 244–268.