

Teaching Tip Tuesday

Ungrading

Tapping into Intrinsic Motivation

Ungrading is a pedagogical strategy that involves provision of formative feedback on learning activities rather than providing points or letter grades. Research indicates that grades on formative/practice work often undermine students' intrinsic motivation to improve by focusing their attention on grades as an end-point rather than on the process of learning. Using Ungrading in your course may help your students cultivate a growth mindset, foster continual improvement, and enhance metacognitive skills. It may also reduce the utility of students relying on generative AI to assist in their work. In most studies, students have responded favorably to this approach.

Tips for effective Ungrading

1. Make the student your partner.

- **Be a facilitator, not a judge.** Your role is to help the student to improve knowledge and skills, not to be the sole arbiter of the value of the students' work.
- **Provide choice.** Allowing the student more freedom in outlining their goals for improvement within the framework of your course learning outcomes increases their agency, which improves intrinsic motivation.

2. Be transparent about the relationship between assignments and achievement of learning outcomes.

3. Provide Feedback in multiple forms.

- **Class-level feedback:** Review the work of multiple students to identify common problems. Work with the class to discuss constructive solutions.
- **Individual-level feedback:** Engage student in self reflection on their work. Ask Socratic questions about the work. Comment on both strengths and weaknesses. Invite questions. Provide non-judgmental suggestions for improvement, with an eye not only to the current work, but to future work.
- **Peer feedback:** Form pairs of students who will critique each other's work. Train students in providing feedback. Give examples of different types of comments on work, and have the class assess their impact and usefulness. Provide a template or rubric for feedback from peers.
- **Group feedback:** Engage students in larger groups to review the same work. This can provide multiple perspectives to consider.
- **Self reflection:** Ask students to consider what they like about their work, and what they might have done differently. Reflection on feedback received by the instructor or peers and how they will use the feedback to improve their work going forward is a useful metacognitive exercise.

Williams, H. 2020. Will Students Engage If There Are No Grades? A Review of the Evidence, and an Experiment in Ungrading. Conference Presentation: International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation, Volume 13.