

Resources FWS Instructors | Grading Contracts

WHAT are Grading Contracts—

Grading Contracts are a system of grading that “decouple[s] evaluation from grades” (Elbow and Danielewicz, 10), and instead, gives students grades based on their work or labors. Students’ labors might include completing homework assignments, attending and participating in class, turning in assignments, drafts and revisions on time, and turning in a specific page-requirement for each assignment.

Key Features

- Student writing and work is not *graded* for quality (though quality is regularly discussed).
- Grades are not given on individual assignments; they are typically withheld until midterm and/or the end of the semester.
- Teachers do provide written feedback on student writing that responds to their ideas, explains their strengths and weaknesses, and offers suggestions for either revisions or future improvements; feedback is only geared towards responding to their writing—there is no need to justify or explain a grade.
- Higher final course grades are the result of extra work that is intended to increase and deepen learning experiences for students.
- Teachers keep track of student labors by recording attendance and homework and assignments as complete, incomplete, missing, or late.
- All work (homework, attendance, major assignments, drafts) is treated as being equally important; that is, there are no percentages that create work hierarchies (e.g., research paper is 30% of the grade, participation is 10%).
- Students understand exactly how to get various letter grades and have a clear understanding of where they’re at all semester. Students have more agency and access to whatever grade they want to get.
- There is room for varying levels of teacher-student negotiations of final grades, given extenuating circumstances, that is encouraged to take place via face-to-face discussions.

Different Models

Guaranteed B (Elbow and Danielewicz, 2008)

- All students are guaranteed a B for completing the work of the course and missing no more than 1 week of class;
- Grades higher than a B are based on the teacher’s evaluation of the *quality* of the writing, as going above and beyond the basic expectations; an “A” is for rewarding superior writing quality.

All Grades Are Labor-Based

- The default grade is still a “B”; however, students get an “A” not through stronger quality of writing, but through laboring more—via extra credit, longer papers, including more sources, etc. (Inoue 2019)
- Final +/-s on course grades are either at the teacher’s discretion or the result of extra labor

Different Approaches to Classroom Negotiated Contract

- Through class discussions, you arrive at what “A”, “B” or “C” writing is, and this is how you grade student writing (Shor 1996)
- Through class discussions, you negotiate what level of effort an “A”, “B” or “C” involves and that is the grading contract (Inoue 2005)
- Both of these models involve classrooms that center a good amount of class time on discussing grading, writing, and effort as class content

Different Approaches to Communicating Grades with Students

- Tallying students’ efforts each unit, providing them with a unit grade based on their labors;
- Tallying students’ labors and giving them a midterm contract grade, and then a final course grade;
- Waiting until the very end of the class to evaluate efforts and grades
- Asking students to keep a labor log (Inoue 2019), so they are aware of their efforts and grade throughout the semester;
- Using Canvas to collect all homework and writing assignments, so students can see what work has been turned in on time and what hasn’t

WHY use Grading Contracts—

There are a number of pedagogical reasons to shift to grading contracts. Here are a few that are explored in more depth in some of the references below.

Grading contracts are valuable because they:

- Offer students the opportunity to be experimental and exploratory in their writing—to take risks, rather than only producing writing that is thought to be “correct” or doing exactly and only “what the assignment requires”;
- Value the time and labor students decide to commit to the class; privilege students who are investing the time, energy and effort into literacy learning.
- Create opportunities for teacher feedback to be more of a genuine response to student writing instead of a justification of a particular grade;
- Encourage students to engage with feedback on their writing more;
- Provide students with a clear and concrete understanding of their grade at all times throughout the semester; grades are simple and easy to calculate;

- Do not penalize or reward students for the level of knowledge about and experience with writing and language prior to entering class; all students have the same potential to earn an A;
- Encourage diverse writing and are accepting of language differences.

HOW do Grading Contracts Work—

Using grading contracts requires thinking through some logistics. The following questions and bulleted considerations and options are some of the key aspects of a grading contract that are worth some extra pre-semester planning and thinking time.

How will you create **meaningful extra work** that fosters deeper learning experiences?

- Create a limited amount of extra credit projects students can do throughout the semester at any time;
- Create add-ons to major assignments that ask for more work (longer, the use of more sources), reflection on the work and learning, resources for other students, additional revisions and feedback from others, or other small ways to increase the work in ways that foster learning;
- Consider when you will allow extra work to be completed—any time students want, when major assignments are due, or some combination of the two
- Consider how much extra work is necessary to get an “A”; ideally, you want to create a balance between extra work being rigorous, but doable by all students.

How will you **track** student labors and work?

- Ask students to submit all homework and assignments using Blackboard/Canvas to track lateness via timestamps (making each assignment worth 1 point means that students either have 1 point per assignment or a 0, is a way to use the grading features in these LMS systems)
- Use your own spreadsheet (Recommendation: take notes regarding dates, homework/assignment name, and level of completion)
- Consider the different options of labor-based categories and their implications:
 - “Late” work means that you’re allowing students to make it up within a 48-hour window;
 - “Unsubmitted” work might mean that something is either done or not done, no make-ups allowed
 - “Complete” vs. “Incomplete” should be clearly articulated for both yourself and students. In writing classes, for example, a “complete” draft (for me) means an introduction, use of all required materials/sources, a full essay with all body paragraphs, and meeting the minimum page length (I let the conclusion slide for drafts). While you can be flexible about complete/incomplete, it helps to have a clear definition when starting.

What are you willing to **negotiate with students**? When and how?

- Will you allow students to do extra work to eliminate absences, late work, etc.? If so, how much extra work is necessary for what?
- Will you allow students to use “pleas” in order to advocate that a particular lateness, absence, etc. not count against their grade? If so, what is your procedure for this?
- Will you allow students to negotiate their final grade or the +/-? If so, when and how?
- Will you allow the class to discuss and negotiate the terms of the grading contract? If so, when and how will you build this into your class time?
- When and how will you let students know where they are at in terms of their final grade?

SAMPLE GRADING CONTRACTS—

- Fully Labor-Based Contracts
 - Appendix A | Labor-Based Grading Contract based on Inoue's model (Kate Navickas, Cornell)
 - Appendix B | Labor-Based Grading Contract based on Elbow and Danielewicz's Model (Tracy Carrick, Cornell)
 - Appendix C | Unit-based Grading Contract that de-emphasizes extra credit work (Kate Navickas, Cornell)
 - Appendix C | Unit-based Grading Contract that de-emphasizes extra credit work (Kate Navickas, Cornell)
 - Appendix D | Unit-based Grading Contract explained via Q&A to students (Katie Arhern, SUNY Cortland)
- Partially Labor-Based Grading Contract
 - Appendix E | Guaranteed B Contract (Elbow)
 - Appendix F | B-Contract Version of Elbow and Danielewicz's Grading Contract (Tracy Carrick, Cornell)

Further Reading

Elbow, Peter and Jane Danielewicz. “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching.” English Department Faculty Publication Series, University of Massachusetts—Amherst, January 2008. Available on the SCHOLARWORKS@UMassAmherst website: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/eng_faculty_pubs/11/

Inoue, Asao B. *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2015. Available on the WAC Clearinghouse website: <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/inoue/>

----- . “Community-Based Assessment Pedagogy.” *Assessing Writing* vol. 9, 2005: 208-38.

----- . *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2019. Available on the WAC Clearinghouse website: <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/labor/>

Grading Contract

WRIT 1420 | Fall 2019

For our FWS, WRIT 1420, we will be using a grading contract. A grading contract is a system of grades that are based primarily on your *labors* and *efforts*. That means that your final course letter grade will be the result of your participation, attendance, and completion of homework, assignments and revisions (as detailed explicitly below), rather than a subjective evaluation of your final assignments as compared to the writing of your peers (as typical grades are usually assigned).

Grading contracts are valuable for a number of reasons, including the fact that they:

- Offer you the opportunity to be experimental and exploratory in your writing—to take risks, rather than only producing writing that is thought to be “correct” or doing exactly and only “what the assignment requires”;
- Value the time, effort and labor you decide to commit to the class;
- Provide you with a clear and concrete understanding of your grade at all times throughout the semester; grades are simple and easy to calculate;
- Do not penalize or reward you for the level of knowledge about and experience you have with writing and language prior to entering our class; all students have the same potential to earn an A;
- Privilege students who are investing the time, energy and effort into literacy learning.

While grading contracts focus on quantifiable outcomes (attendance, participation, completed work), that does not mean that you will not be expected to attend to and revise your writing and work for its quality. Grading contracts function on the belief that quality writing is the result of one’s efforts at drafting, getting and understanding feedback from others, and revising.

Grading Contract: General Terms of Agreement

1. **Attendance & Lateness.** You agree to strive to attend every class and individual conference and be on time. If extenuating circumstances prevent you from attending class, you are responsible for asking your classmates about announcements and/or new requirements. If you are 10 minutes late (or more) four times, that will count as one absence. (Of course, being a few minutes late a few times in a semester is understandable.)
2. **Participation & Collaboration.** You agree to participate in ways that best fit you and that are most appropriate for each day’s goal (by actively listening, taking notes, asking questions, offering comments, etc.). You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups, to share your writing, to listen supportively to the writing of others, and, when called for, give full and thoughtful assessments that help your colleagues consider ways to revise.
3. **Homework & Assignments.** You agree to strive to turn in on time all homework and assignments. All should be **completed fully** and **meet all assignment requirements**. If you face extenuating circumstances, please email me ahead of time. If you are absent, you are responsible for submitting work that’s due **on time**. *The following guidelines apply to all assignments, including homework, drafts, and final assignments:*

Timeliness:

Late Assignments: An assignment is considered “late” if it is turned in after its initial due date and time, but submitted within two days (48 hours).

Make-up Assignments: An assignment is considered a “make-up” if it is turned in at some point in the semester but after the 48-hour window.

Ignored Assignments. Any assignments not done at all, for whatever reason, are considered “Ignored.” Even one ignored assignment will prevent you from earning a B or higher in the course (see chart below). **IMPORTANT: *Drafts of major essays cannot be submitted late. If drafts are not submitted on time, they will be considered “ignored.” AND, if assignments are not completed fully, they may be marked as “ignored” (see below).***

Completion:

Each project must fully meet the expectations of the assignment. The project will not qualify as “complete” unless it has achieved all of the goals of the assignment as discussed in class or explained on handouts. This means that projects are not just done but done in the manner expected. If I find that a given project is not “complete,” I will contact you about rewriting and how this will affect your final grade.

Improvement:

While you do not have to worry about anyone’s judgments or standards to meet the grading contract, you are obligated to listen carefully to and address your colleagues’ and my concerns in all your work of the class. This means that when you receive feedback you’ll use that feedback to help you continually improve your writing. You won’t just correct errors or touch up pieces here and there in this class. Each major essay and project will be reshaped, extended, or complicated as necessary based on the feedback you receive. You will also need to make efforts to improve your copy editing skills. While I certainly do not expect error-free texts, I do expect you to take an active role in developing your English language usage, grammar, and mechanics. If too little changes in your writing over the course of the semester, I will contact you so that we can make a plan and/or determine how this will affect your final grade.

Overview of Grade Breakdown Guidelines

	# of Absences	# of Late Assigns.	# of Make-up Assigns.	# of Ignored Assigns.	# of Extra Assigns.
A	2 or fewer	1	0	0	2
B	3 or fewer	2	1	0	0
C	4 or fewer	3	2	1	0
D	5 or fewer	4	3	2	0
F	6 or fewer	5 or more	4 or more	3 or more	0

"A" Grades

Grades of "A" depend on you 1) being absent three times or less, having one or no "late" assignments, and no "make-up" or "ignored" assignments; and 2) completing **extra work**. Thus, you earn an "A" if you do extra work and you exceed "B" expectations for attendance, participation, and for submitting homework and other assignments.

"B" Grades

In a way, "B" is the default grade for this class. You earn a "B" if you put in good time and effort and do all required work in an acceptable fashion. Grades of "B" depend on you having four or fewer absences, having two or fewer "late" assignments, no more than one "make-up" assignment, and no "ignored" assignments. No extra assignments are required for a "B."

Grades Lower Than "B"

I hope no one will aim for lower grades. If you miss more than four classes, turn in more than two "late" assignments, turn in more than one "make up" assignment, or have any "ignored" assignments, your grade will drop below a "B." Thus, the quickest way to slide to a "C," "D," or "F" is to miss classes and/or not submit assignments. See the "Breakdown" section above to see the specifications for each grade below a "B."

Extra Work Options

As noted above, to get an "A" in this class, you are required to do two "extra assignments." Extra assignments mean that, in some way, you've gone above and beyond for existing assignments or to increase your literacy learning in another way. Each one of the below efforts will earn you one extra assignment credit. One extra assignment effort can also be used eliminate: 1 late assignment; 1 missed assignment; and 1 absence; thus, extra work is a way to improve your grade. To eliminate one ignored assignment, you will need two extra work credits.

Each of the following will result in one extra assignment credit:

- **Extra Rhetorical Précis/Summaries:** You can either write an additional summary of a shared class reading (a reading I didn't ask you to summarize already for homework) or by locating an extra source for your final research paper and writing a rhetorical précis for it.
- **A Bigger Project:** For each project we do, you can opt to do more labor on it at each phase of invention, research, drafting, and revision. This mostly means more research and/or sources incorporated into the culminating artifact, and the related documents that help you build your drafts, such as our annotated bibliographies, which we will do before the project is drafted. For earlier essays, this may mean a longer final essay.
- **A lesson/activity/handout:** These handouts are on a topic and material that you research for the class's benefit and will need at least 2 weeks lead time, working with me (Kate) on the materials. While we'll determine together the scope your lesson, the main elements of your labor will be to produce: (1) a 1-2 page handout for the class's benefit in our writing and thinking; (2) some outline for our in-class activity that introduces your handout; and (3) a short reflective essay to me (Kate) of about 1-2 pages (300-600 words) on what you learned in the

process of doing this labor and what you feel the class stands to gain from the lesson you offered us.

- **Student Pitched:** Some other labor that benefits the class and our mutual learning of rhetoric, language diversity, and academic writing. Do you want to write about and report to us on a cultural event related to the class? Or maybe you would like to read an article for us and summarize some of its findings or ideas that you think will help us do our work in class? If you have an idea, come to me (Kate) early. We will plan it, while making sure the amount of labor is commensurate with the other items above.
- **Writing Center Visits:** Complete two visits to the writing center to get writing support. You will need to ask the tutor to email you the client report from your session, which you will need to forward to me. In addition to the two visits, you will need to write a short (300-600 word) reflection for me (Kate) on your experiences getting tutored and what you've learned about writing. Note: for tutoring to be successful, you need to attend sessions prepared to discuss and actively think and work on your writing with the tutor.

Exceptions

University and Military Obligations. Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, performance, band, etc.) will not count against you, as stipulated by university policy, as long as you FIRST provide written documentation within the first two weeks of the semester of all absences. This same policy applies if you have mandatory military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.). This will allow us to determine ahead of time how you will meet assignments and our contract, despite being absent.

Pleas. Because we all know that life isn't perfect and that each semester does not always go according to our plans, I offer you one plea that you can make to me to change your progress in the course. For instance, you might plea to get a late or missed assignment removed from your record so that you may still meet our contract, etc. **Anyone can make a plea to me once during the semester.** However, there must be some kind of special or extenuating circumstances that warrants the plea. You may not plead a case just because you want something removed from your record.

+/- Grades. +/- grades will be assigned at my discretion. They will be used in cases when 1) your assignments and participation suggest you labored above and beyond the expectations (+); 2) the quality and completeness of your major projects, smaller assignments, and participation is lacking in one way or another (-); or, 3) in the case that that a plea is granted and/or we determine special accommodations are in order. You will be notified if your final grade will have a + or -.

Accommodations/Inclusivity. The goal of the Grading Contract is to meet you where you are in your reading and writing experience and to support you in growing as a critical thinker, reader, writer, communicator and collaborator. Additionally, the purpose is to ensure students are having the opportunity to work in a just environment that adapts to their needs and equally supports each students' learning. Thus, when necessary I will work with individuals on a case-by-case basis to determine how best to accommodate your needs as a learner and the course's learning outcomes.

Ultimately, the Grading Contract functions as a model for forming professional relationships and professional communication practices.

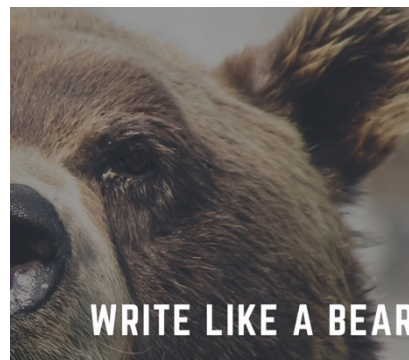
Grading contracts originate from research in the field of rhetoric and composition by Dr. Peter Elbow and Asao Inoue that has sought more equitable and just grading practices. This grading contract has been adapted from their work, as well as from the contracts of Dr. Missy Watson and Dr. Nicole Howell.

***By staying in our course, you agree to all of the above terms, and I agree to keep track of the above details responsibly and enforce them democratically.**

COURSE EXPECTATIONS | LABOR-BASED GRADING CONTRACT

To best meet course learning outcomes and to earn at least a B as your final course grade, you must:

- attend class—not missing more than 3 classes or conferences;
- meet due dates and writing criteria for all assignments;
- participate in all in-class exercises and activities;
- come to class fully prepared having read all assigned readings and completed all homework assignments;
- give peer feedback in assigned formats and work respectfully with peers on other collaborative tasks;
- sustain effort and investment on each draft of all papers;
- make substantive revisions to drafts—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up;
- proofread all final revisions of formal assignments until they conform to the conventions of edited, academic English;
- attend writing consultations to discuss drafts; and
- submit all Formal and Mini Writing Assignments.



In your writing specifically, you must:

- seek complexity in your writing by exploring some genuine question or puzzlement;
- use your writing to do some figuring-out. (An essay needs to move or go somewhere. It needs to demonstrate a progression of logical thinking.)
- take risks, try new things, experiment, play, even fail in your efforts occasionally, and be ready to learn from every draft.

Throughout the semester, I use only three possible grades: Complete, Incomplete, and Missing. You will earn a Complete for each assignment as long as you: fully complete/participate in the assigned work/activity; reach the specified learning outcomes, and demonstrate conscientious citizenship and leadership. If you complete all assignments and meet the above course expectations (totaling 85 points as detailed in the table on the next page), you will earn a final course grade of at least a B.

To earn a final course grade higher than a B, you must complete several Extra Assignments designed to help you reach – with increasing consistency and control – the features of effective writing detailed in Course Learning Outcomes. We will work together to select the extra assignments that can help you to target and practice the features of academic writing you will need to best meet your personal, academic, disciplinary, professional, and civic goals and aspirations.

You must write, and read, as if your life depended upon it. ~Adrienne Rich

WORDS OF CAUTION

I do my best to steer all students to final course grades of B or better, but if you choose to miss classes and show up without assignments, your final course grade will slide to a C, D, or F. You are not eligible for a passing grade of D if you have not attended at least 11 of the 14 weeks of classes and completed 90% of the assignments. And you can't just turn in all the late work at the end of the semester.

Course Expectations developed with Peter Elbow and Jane Danielwicz as presented in: Elbow, Peter and Jane Danielewicz. "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching." College Composition and Communication 61.2 (December 2009).

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS | LABOR-BASED GRADING CONTRACT

TO EARN A GRADE OF B OR S, COMPLETE

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (GRADED COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, OR MISSING)		
Mini Writing Assignment 1	Literacy Narrative (2 pages)	Due 2/2 (5 points)
Formal Writing Assignment 1	Persuasive Letter (3 pages)	Due 2/12 (10 points)
Mini Writing Assignment 2	Summary (1 page)	Due 2/16 (5 points)
Mini Writing Assignment 3	Rhetorical Analysis (2 pages)	Due 2/16 (5 points)
Mini Writing Assignment 4	Descriptive Paragraph (1 page)	Due 2/23 (5 points)
Formal Writing Assignment 2	Food Culture Profile (3 pages)	Due 3/8 (10 points)
Formal Writing Assignment 3	Book Review (3 pages)	Due 4/10 (10 points)
Mini Writing Assignment 5	Descriptive Essay (2 pages)	Due 4/10 (5 points)
Formal Writing Assignment 4	Synthesis Essay (4 pages)	Due 4/19 (10 points)
Formal Writing Assignment 5	Research Project (6 pages)	Due 5/11 (10 points)
Portfolio	Reflection on 5 formal writing assignment (2 pages)	Due 5/15 (5 points)

LEADERSHIP ASSIGNMENTS (GRADED COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, OR MISSING)		
Class Facilitation	Presentation of an assigned chapter	4/20 (2.5 points)
Final Presentation		5/11 (2.5 points)

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS (GRADED COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, OR MISSING)		
Discussion Board Posts	(Meet assigned target number)	In-class Participation or Equivalent
Hypothes.is Annotations	(Meet assigned target number)	In-class Participation or Equivalent
In-Class Peer Reviews	(Meet assigned target number)	In-class Participation or Equivalent

TO EARN A GRADE HIGHER THAN A B, COMPLETE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING

EXTRA ASSIGNMENTS		
Extra Assignments	Discussion Board Posts & Hypothes.is Annotations (Exceed assigned target number each week)	Weekly (1 point each week)
Extra Writing Assignment	Research Paper Supersize (+6 pages)	Due 5/15 (up to 10 points)
Extra Writing Assignment	Op/Ed or Blog post on Research Paper Topic (3 pages)	Due 5/15 (up to 5 points)
Extra Writing Assignment	Weekly Journal & Reflection (11 pages)	Due 5/15 (up to 10 points)
Extra Writing Assignment	Rewrite of an Assigned Course Reading (3 pages)	Due 5/15 (up to 5 points)
Extra Writing Assignment	Portfolio Supersize (+6 pages)	Due 5/15 (up to 10 points)
Extra Writing Assignment	Design Your Own Writing Project (3 pages)	Due 5/15 (up to 5 points)

Grade Agreement

WRIT 1420 | Fall 2020

A **grade agreement** is a system of grades that are based primarily on your *labors* or *work completed*. That means that your final course letter grade will be the result of your participation, attendance, and completion of homework, drafts, and assignments, rather than a subjective evaluation of your final assignments as compared to the writing of your peers (as typical grades are usually assigned).

Grade agreements are valuable for a number of reasons, including the fact that they:

- Offer you the opportunity to be experimental and exploratory in your writing—to take risks, rather than only producing writing that is thought to be “correct” or doing exactly and only “what the assignment requires”;
- Value the time and labor you decide to commit to the class;
- Provide you with a clear and concrete understanding of your grade at all times throughout the semester; grades are simple and easy to calculate;
- Do not penalize or reward you for the level of knowledge about and experience you have with writing and language prior to entering our class; all students have the same potential to earn an A;
- Privilege students who are investing the time, energy and effort into literacy learning.

While grade agreements focus on quantifiable outcomes (attendance, participation, completed work), that does not mean that you will not be expected to attend to and revise your writing and work for its quality. **Grade agreements function on the belief that quality writing is the result of one’s efforts at drafting, getting and understanding feedback from others, and revising.**

Grade Explanation

In order to give you a grade, I will be using the below rubric to track your work throughout the semester. However, **I will also ask you to do some tracking—after every major assignment, you will be asked to reflect on what grade you think you deserve for the unit based on the work you completed and how that work aligns with the below descriptions. After you complete each major assignment, you will be given a grade for the entire unit’s work—all units are weighted equally.**

A-level Work includes...

- Completing all homework before class and conferences
- **Homework tasks are more than simply complete, they represent the writer's efforts to engage thoughtfully and deeply with the task at hand**
- Not missing more than 2 classes and attending all conferences
- Regularly participating in class by: being prepared to discuss readings or share homework, closely reading and responding to peers’ writing in group work, and asking questions to clarify or deepen the conversation
- Turning in a *complete* draft for all major assignments, having complete drafts for your conference (all body paragraphs are drafted)
- *Substantially* revising final drafts to attend to feedback

- Writing thoughtful and specific answers to any required reflective writing (analyzing your writing choices in final essays, providing evidence from your writing)
- Writing essays that engage deeply with the readings and that are complete because they finish the thinking-work of the essay (not because they hit a page number)
- Working your best to grow as a writer, by regularly engaging in class, conferences, feedback on your writing, and by seeking outside resources (the Writing Center) when appropriate

B-level Work includes...

- Completing most of the homework in preparation for class
- Homework is complete and engages with the task at hand
- Not missing more than 3 classes and/or one conference
- Participating in class some of the time, uneven commitment to group work
- Turning in almost complete drafts of all four essays
- Revising all four drafts in response to feedback
- Meeting the expectations of the assignments in terms of page length, source-use, etc.
- Completing required reflective writing, but not being specific or writing answers that don't really engage with the question (e.g., too short, too vague, unclear)
- Working to have good ideas--logic and thinking work--in final essays

C-Level Work includes...

- Not regularly completing homework in time for class or conferences
- Homework may be complete, but in ways that do not fully engage with the task at hand (for example, not citing evidence, not enacting analysis, not fully thought-through responses, etc.)
- Missing 5 or more classes and/or conferences
- Two or more drafts are no more than half complete
- Revising only half of the draft or finishing the half-finished draft and calling that a final essay
- Half-complete or unfinished required reflective writing
- Homework and essays fail to consider previous feedback on writing

D-Level Work includes...

- Regularly not completing homework and being unprepared for class
- Missing 6 or more classes and/or conferences
- Not participating in class or group work
- Not completing one or more major writing assignments
- Not completing 2 or more drafts
- Homework and essays fail to consider previous feedback on writing

Failing the course would result from...

- Not completing two or more major writing assignments
- Missing more than 3 weeks of classes
- Submitting drafts and final assignments that are not your own work and writing

Negotiations

Accommodations/Inclusivity. The goal of the grade agreement is to meet you where you are in your reading and writing experience and to support you in growing as a critical thinker, reader, writer, communicator and collaborator. Additionally, the purpose is to ensure you have **the opportunity to work in a just environment** that adapts to your needs and equally supports learning for all students in the class. Thus, when necessary I will work with individuals on a case-by-case basis to determine how best to accommodate your needs as a learner and the course's learning outcomes. **I welcome each of you to regularly check-in with me during conferences and through your required essay reflections about your individual learning needs, specific issues and/or accommodations you need, and your grade.**

+/- Grades. Final +/-s on grades will be assigned at my discretion. They will be used in cases when 1) your assignments and participation suggest you labored above and beyond the expectations (+); 2) the quality and completeness of your major projects, smaller assignments, and participation is lacking in one way or another (-); or, 3) in the case that that we determine special accommodations are in order. You should reflect on whether or not any of these points should apply to you before your final conference.

Grade agreements originate from research in the field of rhetoric and composition by Dr. Peter Elbow and Asao Inoue that has sought more equitable and just grading practices.

***By staying in our course, you agree to all of the above terms, and I agree to keep track of the above details responsibly and enforce them democratically.**

Contract Grading Explained

Contract Grading

Labor-Based (or “work-based”) Contract Grading is a system of grading based off the research of Asao Inoue (2015; 2018). It differs from traditional grading in that you do not receive a grade based on the subjective quality of your work, but instead based on the labor (or work) you complete within the course. In other words, you will receive feedback from me, comments, suggestions for revision, encouragement, and support, but you will not receive an “A, B, C, D, or E” based on how “well” you completed the project.

FAQs

Q: Will I still receive grades for my projects?

A: Yes, there are three types of labor in our class—**projects, practices, and community labor**. In the first type you will receive a grade based on the following table:

Project Grading Table

Criteria	Grade Earned
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project includes all specified criteria (ex. page length, parts of project, types of questions explored, number of texts or sources used, etc.)Turned in within 48 hours of the assigned project deadline	B
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project includes all parts but it more than 48 hours late ORYour project does not include significant parts	B-
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project does not include all parts AND is more than 48 hours late	C+
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is more than 4 days late	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is more than 4 days late AND is missing significant parts	C-
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is 8 days late or later	D
<ul style="list-style-type: none">You didn't turn in the project	0

Q: What????!! How do I get an A on my projects?

A: In order to move up from any of these scores, at the time you turn in the project you will have the option to complete any of the 3 “+” parts associated with the project. (Ex. if you are completing a tutorial project an example of a + part might be a 2-page audience analysis. If you are writing a short story an example of a + part might be to write a scene in an alternate point of view.)

Kati Ahern, SUNY Cortland

It is important to note that each assignment prompt will always include the 3 optional + parts from the start. If you turn in your completed project on-time and you do 1 + part that = B+, 2 = A-, and 3 = A. However, these + parts can also help you to move up from any of the other scores on the table. So, if you turn in a project 8 days late, but you complete all 3 + parts you can move from a D to a C.

Q: So the + parts are extra credit?

A: Not exactly. The + parts are designed to move your learning experience from a B to an A level of exceptional work. However, they are also designed to be accessible. What that means is that even if you are struggling with the assignment, you will be able to complete any or all of the 3 + parts. Also, unlike extra credit, the + parts **MUST** be turned in at the time of the assignment. However, you will have the opportunity to complete only 2 additional + parts (not per project, but 2 in total) by the last day of classes. This is so that if you had wanted to do more but life got in the way, you still have a small chance to do so at the end. **HOWEVER**, you cannot turn in more than 2 + parts in total at the end.

Q: You said there were three types of labor—projects, practices, and community labor. How do the others work?

A: Practices are completion-based homework and informal writing. You will receive a score based on the number you complete within 48 hours of the time assigned. (# completed/#offered.) Practices cannot be turned in later than 48 hours of the assignment because they are based on *practicing* for the projects.

Community Labor is also graded on a completion score (# completed/#offered) with a grace allowance of 3. (This means you can miss up to 3 community assignments or participation in class days.) Like in-class participation, community labor assignments benefit your class community, such as peer review letters or critiques. Community labor cannot be made up or accepted late.

Q: Why did you do this? What if I'm used to getting As in my writing classes? Doesn't this system hurt me?

A: Labor-based contract grading is meant to address inequities in courses. If you consider yourself an "A" writer, this system does not disadvantage you. It will likely still take you less time to complete a project or a + part, and if you identify as loving writing—it might be "more fun" for you than it is for some of your peers. That is still a tangible advantage. What labor-based grading does is try to correct for some of the subjectivity of writing, some of the power structures by which we assess writing, and make it possible for everyone to earn the grade for which they labor.

****Labor is NOT the Same as Effort**

Labor-based systems are different from assessing people based on “effort.” I have no way of knowing how much effort you put into any given project. I cannot look into your minds, hearts, or lives and know that. Therefore, grading on effort would not be a fair system. For example, you might put forth a tremendous amount of effort (and I hope you do!) However, I have no way of fairly assessing how much “effort” a project required of you. What I can assess is how much labor you completed in terms of how many projects and project components (+ parts) you chose to complete. I understand that it may take different students different amounts of time to complete projects, but a labor-based system focuses solely on good faith completion, and writing as a learning process.

Q: This seems difficult.

A: I think it might be a difficult adjustment for some of you at first. But remember, you will still receive grades. This system just removes some of the surprises from grading. It isn't perfect, but you know when you did a + part or you didn't and you know when you turned something in on-time or you didn't. Beyond that, you will still receive all the feedback, support, and encouragement you need in order to revise and improve on your writing projects and learning process.

Kati Ahern, SUNY Cortland

Examples of How Contract Grading Could Work

With the “Base” Project and Additional “+ Parts” that scale learning up from a B to a B+, A-, A depending on how many of the three offered “+ Parts” a student completes at the time of the core assignment.

Example: Inquiry/Analysis Project

If the core of this assignment was a Genre Analysis, then the “Base” or “Core” of the project might involve the following requirements of the assignment:

The Genre Analysis must be 4-5 pages, talk about the preconceptions of the genre or history of the genre or antecedent genres, talk about the 3 texts as examples of the genre, talk about genre boundaries, genre blurring, similarities and differences.

The “+ Parts” are as follows: += 1-pg revision/process discussion, += 2-pg. related genres comparison, += 1-pg analysis of why it is useful to study genres

Example: Tutorial (Set of Instructions) Project (from my current PWR 393 Syllabus)

In this project you will compose a complex, multiple-step tutorial (or set of instructions.) It is essential that your tutorial be written for a specific audience and serve a need. (Ex. You should not design a tutorial for a “simple” task such as making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or an audience that would already know how to accomplish the task.) Additionally, your tutorial MUST involve visual and verbal components, and involve at least 6 complex steps.

The following are 3 possible “+” parts: + = a 1-pg audience analysis and rationale for your tutorial; + = a 2-pg genre analysis of at least 3 other tutorials that already exist on your topic/related topics and why your tutorial fits the needs of your audience better; + = a 1-pg revision memo, detailing which revisions you would want to make in design, content, layout, and organization would better address the needs of your audience. **Remember, you can choose to do any, all, or none of these + parts.

	A	B	C	D	F
Absences					
Self-Evaluations	1 or fewer	2	3	3	4 or more
Dialogue initial post	1 or fewer	1 or fewer	2	2	3 or more
Dialogue responses	4 or fewer	5	5	5	6 or more
Practices, Projects, and Other					
Late practices	2 or fewer	3	4	5	6 or more
Late projects	1 or fewer	1 or fewer	1 or fewer	1 or fewer	1 or fewer
Missed practices	1	2	2	2	3 or more
Missed projects	0	0	0	1	1
Ignored practices	0	0	0	1	2 or more
Ignored projects	0	0	0	0	1 or more
Writing Center "visit"	1 or more	1 or more	1 or more	0	0
Optional projects	3	0	0	0	0

Table 1: Breakdown of minimum expectations by grade

Here is another version of a contract grading system developed by Dawn Sheppard at Boise State. Late = after the assigned deadline, missed = more than 48 hours late, ignored = not completed.

A CONTRACT FOR A FINAL GRADE OF B IN FIRST YEAR WRITING

Peter Elbow

[A version I often used and invited UMass instructors to use or imitate or adjust.]

To students in my first year writing course,

Imagine that this weren't an official course for credit at UMass, but instead that you had all seen my advertisement in the paper and were freely coming to my home studio for a class in painting or cooking. We would have classes or workshops or lessons, but there would be no official grading. Of course I'd give you evaluative feedback now and then, pointing out where you've done well and where I could suggest an improvement. But I wouldn't put grades on your individual paintings or omelets or give you an official grade for the course.

I believe that home-studio situation is more conducive to learning than the one we have in this course--where many of you are *not* here by choice and I am obliged to give an official University grade. Therefore, I will try to *approximate* the evaluative conditions of a home studio course. That is, I will try to create a *culture of support*: a culture where you and I function as allies rather than adversaries and where you cooperate with classmates rather than compete with them.

Conventional grading often leads students to think more about grades than about writing; to worry more about pleasing me or psyching me out than about figuring out what you really want to say or how you want to say it; to be reluctant to take risks with your writing; sometimes even to feel you are working *against* me or having to hide part of yourselves from me. I taught for nine years at Evergreen State College where no grades were given--just written evaluations. The system worked fine and was a benefit for both teaching and learning.

For these reasons, I am using a kind of contract for grading. I will give you plenty of feedback on much of your writing. But I will not put grades on your papers and my comments will have no effect on your final grade for the course--up to the grade of B.

You are guaranteed a final grade of B if you meet the following conditions:

- (1) Attendance. Don't miss more than one week's worth of classes. (If you miss class, you still need to do the assignment.)
- (2) Lateness. Don't be habitually late. (If you are late or miss a class, you still responsible to find out what assignments were made.)
- (3) Late assignments. Don't have more than one late major assignment and one late smaller assignment.
- (4) Journals. Keep up your journal assignments.
- (5) Sharing and responding. Work cooperatively in groups. Be willing to share some of your writing, to listen supportively to the writing of others and, when called for, give full and thoughtful responses.
- (6) Major assignments need to meet the following conditions:
 - Process*. Always include process letter, all previous notes and drafts, and all feedback you got.

- Revisions*. When the assignment is to revise, don't just correct or touch up. Your revision needs to reshape or extend or complicate or substantially clarify your ideas--or relate your ideas to new things. Revisions don't have to be better, but they must be different.
- Copy editing*. When the assignment is for the final publication draft, your paper must be well copy edited--that is, free from virtually all mistakes in spelling and grammar. It's fine to get help in copy editing. (Copy editing doesn't count on early and mid-process drafts.)
- Perplexity*. For every paper, you need to find some genuine question or perplexity. That is, don't just tell four obvious reasons why dishonesty is bad or why democracy is good. Root your paper in a felt *question* about honesty or democracy--a problem or an itch that itches *you*. (By the way, this is a crucial skill to learn for success in college: how to find a question that interests you--even in a boring assignment.)
- Thinking*. Having found a perplexity, then use your paper to do some *figuring-out*. Make some intellectual gears turn. Thus your paper needs to *move* or *go somewhere*--needs to have a line of thinking.
- Don't let these last two conditions bother you. I don't ask that your essays always be tidy, well organized, and perfectly unified. I care more about working through the question than about finding a neat answer. It's okay if your essays have some loose ends, some signs of struggle--especially in early drafts. But lack of unity or neatness needs to reflect *effort*, not lack of effort.

Getting an A/B or A

As you see, the grade of B depends on *behaviors*. Grades of A or A/B, however, depend on *quality*. Thus you earn a B if you put in good time and effort; I will push you all to get a B. But to get an A or A/B, you have to make your time and effort pay off into writing of genuine excellence (and also meet the conditions for a B). Notice that for grades up to B, you don't have to worry about my judgment or my standards of excellence; for higher grades you do. But we'll have class discussions about excellence in writing and usually we can reach fairly good agreement. Your mid-semester and final portfolios will play a big role in decisions about excellence.

Knowing where you stand

This system is better than regular grading for giving you a clear idea of what your final grade looks like at any moment. For whenever I give you feedback on any major assignment, I will tell you clearly if you have somehow failed to satisfy the contract for a B. I will also tell you if I judge your draft to be genuinely excellent and thus to exceed the contract for a B. As for absences and lateness, you'll have to keep track of them, but you can check with me any time.

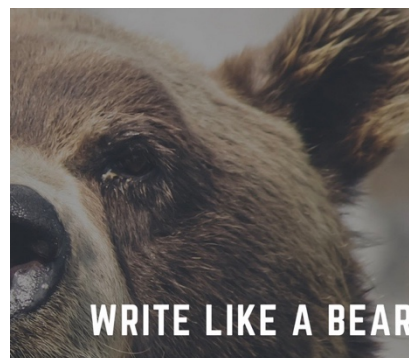
Grades lower than B

I hope no one will aim for lower grades. The quickest way to slide to a C, D, or F is to miss classes and show up without assignments. *This much is nonnegotiable: you are not eligible for a passing grade of D unless you have attended at least 11 of the 14 weeks worth of classes, and completed 90% of the assignments. And you can't just turn in all the late work at the end.* If you are missing classes and behind in work, please stay in touch with me about your chances of passing the course.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS | GRADING CONTRACT

To best meet course learning outcomes and earn a B this semester, you must minimally:

- attend class—not missing more than 3 classes or conferences;
- meet due dates and writing criteria for all assignments;
- participate in all in-class exercises and activities;
- come to class fully prepared having read all assigned readings and completed all homework assignments;
- give thoughtful peer feedback during Writers' Workshops and work sincerely with peers on other collaborative tasks;
- sustain effort and investment on each draft of all papers;
- make substantive revisions to drafts—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up;
- proofread all final revisions of main assignments until they conform to the conventions of edited, academic English;
- attend weekly writing consultations to discuss drafts; and
- submit all formal (6) and mini (6) writing assignments.



In your writing specifically, you must:

- seek complexity in your writing by exploring some genuine question or puzzlement;
- use your writing to do some figuring-out. (An essay needs to move or go somewhere. It needs to demonstrate a progression of logical thinking.)
- take risks, try new things, experiment, play, even fail in your efforts occasionally, and be ready to learn from every draft.

You can earn a final course grade of B entirely on the basis of what you do—on conscientious effort and participation. The grade of B does not derive from my judgment about the quality of writing. ***During the semester, I use only three possible grades: Complete, Incomplete, and Missing.***

To earn a final course grade higher than a B, you must produce writing that consistently reaches the features of effective writing detailed in Course Learning Outcomes. Throughout the semester, I will work with you individually to practice and apply these features to your writing, and at the end of the semester, you will submit a Final Writing Portfolio to showcase your work. Final course grades above a B, then, will be based upon how well you meet the writing goals established in Course Learning Outcomes and targeted and individualized in consultation with me. *Extra credit assignments (no more than 3) can be used to make up for missing or incomplete assignments.*

You must write, and read, as if your life depended upon it. ~Adrienne Rich

WORDS OF CAUTION

I do my best to steer all students to final course grades of B or better, but if you choose to miss classes and show up without assignments, your final course grade will slide to a C, D, or F. You are not eligible for a passing grade of D if you have not attended at least 11 of the 14 weeks of classes and completed 90% of the assignments. And you can't just turn in all the late work at the end of the semester.

Course Expectations developed by Peter Elbow and Jane Danielwicz as presented in:
Elbow, Peter and Jane Danielewicz. "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching." College Composition and Communication 61.2 (December 2009).

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS | GRADING CONTRACT

TO EARN A GRADE OF B OR S, COMPLETE

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (GRADED COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, OR MISSING)		
	Mini Writing Assignment 1 Literacy Narrative (2 pages)	Due 2/2
	Formal Writing Assignment 1 Persuasive Letter (3 pages)	Due 2/12
	Mini Writing Assignment 2 Summary (1 page)	Due 2/16
	Mini Writing Assignment 3 Rhetorical Analysis (2 pages)	Due 2/16
	Mini Writing Assignment 4 Descriptive Paragraph (1 page)	Due 2/23
	Formal Writing Assignment 2 Food Culture Profile (3 pages)	Due 3/1
	Formal Writing Assignment 3 Book Review (3 pages)	Due 3/8
	Mini Writing Assignment 5 Descriptive Essay (2 pages)	Due 3/15
	Formal Writing Assignment 4 Synthesis Essay (4 pages)	Due 3/30
	Mini Writing Assignment 6 Compare/Contrast Essay (3 pages)	Due 4/12
	Formal Writing Assignment 5 Research Project (6 pages)	Due 4/26
	Formal Writing Assignment 6 Op/Ed (3 pages)	Due 5/3
LEADERSHIP ASSIGNMENTS (GRADED COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, OR MISSING)		
	Class Facilitation Presentation of an assigned chapter	Due 4/14 & 4/16
	Final Presentation	Due 4/30
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS (GRADED COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, OR MISSING)		
	Discussion Board Posts (Meet assigned target number)	In-class Participation or Equivalent
	Hypothes.is Annotations (Meet assigned target number)	In-class Participation or Equivalent
	In-Class Peer Reviews (Meet assigned target number)	In-class Participation or Equivalent

TO EARN A GRADE HIGHER THAN A B, SUBMIT

FINAL WRITING PORTFOLIO Final course grades above a B are based on how well the work compiled in the Final Writing Portfolio meets Course Learning Outcomes.	Due 5/11
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1. Early drafts of all 6 formal writing assignments.
2. Revised drafts of at least 3 of the 6 formal writing assignments.
 - o Revision strategies might include adding more sources, expanding focus, making arguments more complex, deepening analysis, and/or amending the essay with a bibliography that includes relevant sources for "further research."
3. Portfolio Reflection.

