Assignments + Assessment: Contract Grading-ENG 104

Overview of Assignments

Close Reading Paper
In-class Performance
Quizzes, Midterm and Final Exams
Contract Grading Reflection and Weekly Labor Log
In-class writing, homework assignments, and feedback sheets

This contract modifies the conventional model of evaluating and grading student writing in ENG 104. Rather than using a standards-based model of assessment wherein the quality of the writing determines the final grade, this contract between you and I recognizes and emphasizes the labor you put into the craft of writing. The contract will help you “practice writing as a multi-faceted process of inquiry, learning, and expression. In short, your final grade in this course will be based on the demonstrable and observable effort that you put into both our in-class and out-of-class work.

Imagine that this wasn’t an official course for credit at UO, but instead that you had seen my advertisement on the internet or in the Eugene Parks and Recreation catalog, and were freely coming to my studio for a class in photography, cooking, or yoga. We would have classes, workshops, or lessons, but there would be no official grading of stir fries or yoga poses, since letters and numbers would be meaningless in those self-enrichment scenarios. But we all would learn, and perhaps in an encouraging, fun, and creative environment. In considering this course and that studio scenario, we might ask ourselves three questions:

Why are grades meaningless in that studio setup?
How do grades affect learning in classrooms?
What social dynamics does the presence of grades create?

In both situations, instructors provide students or participants with evaluative feedback from time to time, pointing out where you’ve done well and where I, as the instructor, could suggest improvement. In the studio situation, many of you would help each other, even rely on each other during and outside of our scheduled meetings. In fact, you’d likely get more feedback on your work and practices than in a conventional classroom where only the teacher is expected to evaluate and grade.

The bottom line is this: failure at writing is vital to learning how to do it better. When we embrace our failures, they show us the places we can learn and improve. That is why we are here. How do we make sure that our goals aren’t about grades in this class, but about our course topic and learning to write?

As you might already notice, what I’m arguing for here is a different kind of classroom, and even a different approach to education. Sir Ken Robinson (2010), a well-known education researcher, makes the argument in a TED talk that typical schooling, with grades and particular standards, is an old and mostly harmful system that we’ve inherited, but now needs to change. For all these reasons, I am incorporating a labor-based grading contract to calculate course grades in our class.

The pedagogical shift I’m suggesting is in part a cultural one. Therefore, we will try to approximate the evaluative conditions of an enrichment course. That is, we will try to create a culture of support, or rather a community of compassion, a group of people who genuinely care about the wellbeing of each other—and part of that caring is doing things for each other. It turns out, this also helps you learn. The best way to learn is to teach others, to help, to serve. Thus, we will function as collaborators, allies, as

~ Samuel Beckett, Worstward Ho
fellow-travelers with various skills, abilities, experiences, and talents that we offer the group, rather than adversaries working against each other for grades or approval by a teacher.

Do not worry. You will get lots of assessments on your writing and other work during the semester from your peers and from me. Our work together will be collaborative, with everyone on equal footing as both writers and readers – including me, your instructor. As a community, we will provide assessments (written and verbal) of each other’s work to rethink ideas and improve your writing and practices, to take risks—in short, to fail and learn from that failing. Always know that I will read everything you write and shape our classroom assessment activities and discussions around your work, but you will not receive grades from me. I want you not only to rely on your colleagues and yourself for assessment and revision advice, but to build strategies of self-assessment that function apart from a teacher’s approval.

Therefore, the default grade for the course is a “B” (85%). In a nutshell, if you do all of the labor asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you work through the processes we establish and the work we assign ourselves during the quarter, if you do all the labor asked of you by meeting the minimum requirements for each required assignment, then you’ll get a “B” course grade. However, if you turn in assignments late, forget to do assignments, or do less labor than what is expected of you, etc., you will earn a lower course grade (see the final grade table below). Higher grades, such as an “A,” require advanced labor. In order to raise your grade, you may complete, according to their guidelines and in the spirit asked of you, the optional “A” labor assignments. Rather than keeping track of what you earn on assignments, you will keep track of your complete, incomplete, missing, and late assignments to determine your grade.

Contract Grading:

1. **Complete Work.** You will earn a “B” course grade (85%) if you agree to meet the following conditions for all assignments stated at the beginning of this contract. You agree to turn in on time and in the appropriate manner complete essays, reflective writing, and other labor assigned that meet all of our agreed upon expectations. **All assignments will have minimum expectations; not meeting these expectations by the due date means that the assignment is incomplete, even when turned in on time.**

2. **Incomplete Work.** You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you, which means you’ll complete all of the minimum requirements for each assignment. I will use a basic rubric to determine whether your work meets all of the requirements of each assignment. If I determine that your work is missing something and therefore not meeting "B" grade expectations, I will let you know. You have 48 HOURS to revise and resubmit any incomplete work to make it to be “Late Work.” You have a one-time opportunity to revise your incomplete work of each assignment.

3. **Late Work.** You are expected to turn in all work on time. However, I understand that life can be unpredictable. You may turn in a few assignments late (see table below). Late work is defined as any work that is submitted AFTER the due date/time BUT within 48 hours of the deadline posted on the syllabus/Canvas. Please notify me before the due date, if you need an extension.

4. **Ignored Work.** You agree not to ignore any work expected of you. Ignored work is any work unaccounted for in the term—that is, I have no record of you doing it or turning it in AFTER 48 hours of the due date. Accumulating any Ignored Work will keep you from meeting our contract expectations because ignoring the work that is so crucial to one’s development as a learner in our community does not meet our primary goal of learning. See the table below for more detail on how “Ignored Work” affects a final course grade.
5. **Attendance.** You agree to consistently attend class sessions and participate in their activities and assignments, which means you will need to be on time and present in class, as most activities cannot be done before or after class and require your colleagues to complete. You are allowed to miss two classes this spring term. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Additional absences will each lower your course grade by 2/3. For example, the first additional absence after one week of absences will reduce a B (85) to a C+ (79), the second additional absence will reduce a C+ (79), to a C (73), and so on.

6. **Sharing and Collaboration.** You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in any shared activity (small and large group discussions, peer review, etc.). This is a heavy discussion-based class and you will be divided into groups. Most of our meetings will process with group discussions, open group responses/interactions, and group reviews. you should **always bring your book and texts to class** so that you will be able to reference the readings we discuss. You cannot pretend that you engage with discussions if you don’t have your books. Because the best way to learn rhetoric and argumentation is to talk your way through it, I expect everyone to be able to interact thoughtfully and contribute meaningfully to our discussions of assigned articles, and I encourage you to make connections between assigned articles and ideas from other classes or personal experiences. Good participation doesn’t necessarily require that you speak often in every class, but it does require that you listen. Participation can include quiet attention, note-taking, and enthusiasm (spoken or unspoken) for in-class activities. It does **NOT** include dominating conversation, thoughtless responses, or disrespect for the voices or opinions of others. To engage with an interactive learning environment, I will call out to listen to your ideas from time to time. Your thoughts are interesting and important to all of us, so please be ready to cheerfully speak up, respect each other, and listen thoughtfully. Intentional rudeness, disrespect, disengagement, sleeping, **Facebooking, cellphoning, working on other homework, tweeting, or other such breaches of decorum will result in a low participation grade and/or an additional absence. I reserve the right to count you as absent without notifying you if you are participating in this kind of rude and/or disengaged behavior.**

7. **Quizzes.** You will take in-class quizzes. The quizzes will be given at the beginning of the class period. I will tell you the dates you will have a quiz; thus, if you miss a quiz due to absence or tardiness, it cannot be made up. The quizzes are designed to gage your comprehension of lecture content and course reading and questions that ask you to reflect on the outcomes of your effort.

8. **Close Reading Paper.** You are required to write a “close reading” paper of passages from the assigned texts (minimum: 2 pages). In the close-reading paper, you need to do a detailed analysis of the passage you choose, including explaining the literary terms, investigating the major themes and tones, elaborating how the diction and metaphors work in the chosen passage.

9. **In-Class Performance.** Each student needs to perform a passage/scenario/dialogue in class in this ten-week course once. You can do a soliloquy or a group performance, depending on your choice and negotiation with your group members. This means you need to read the whole story you will perform so carefully and choose one scene that best represents the spirit of the chosen story. After your performance, we will have a Q & A session between performers and audience to further study and discuss the stories. You as a performer are expected to answer questions and explain how you read, understand, and interpret the chosen story.

10. **Midterm and Final Exams.** Everyone will take in-class midterm and final exams that may include multiple choice, true/false, short answer, matching, or essay questions. They are open-book exams and you are welcome to bring your hard copies of textbook, handouts, and notes during the exams (So I highly recommend that you have your textbook and
print out all Canvas documents on hand for your preview, preparation, and review). No electronic devices, including Apple Watch, cellphones, tablets, etc. are allowed to use. We will have a preparation session for each exam.

**Knowing where you stand:** This system gives you a clear idea of what your final grade looks like at any moment. The grade of B depends primarily on behavior and labor. Thus, you earn a B if you put in good time and effort, participate fully, and complete all of the work assigned. We will expect this from everyone. I will use Canvas for tracking your labor and assignments and note in my final comments to your work whether the assignment is Complete, Late, Incomplete, or Ignored. Ask me at any time if you are unsure of where you stand. Below is a table that shows the main components that affect your successful compliance with our contract.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earned points</th>
<th>Complete Work</th>
<th>Late Work</th>
<th>Incomplete Work</th>
<th>Ignored Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignments are submitted after the due date but within 48 hours</td>
<td>Revise and resubmit incomplete work within 48 hours to make it as “Late Work.” Or it will be graded as “Incomplete Work.”</td>
<td>No submission after 48 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:**
1. Use this grade chart to keep tracking of your complete, late, incomplete and ignored work.
2. You will need to earn a 70% (a C-) to pass the class and enroll in WR 122 or WR 123.
3. Grading Scale for Final Grade: A: 94-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 88-89; B: 84-87; B-: 80-83; C+: 78-79; C: 74-77; C-: 70-73.

**“A” Labors:** In order to raise your grade, you may complete, according to their guidelines and in the spirit asked of you, the advanced “A” labor assignments. Generally, “A” labors will be “more involved’ versions of already required assignments that require you to go more in-depth on a topic or to reflect on your process. “A” labor assignments (more detailed instructions and due dates will be posted with the assignments) are:

1. Completing 2 tutoring sessions with a [writing associate](#) or a [Knight Library](#) writing tutor.
2. Moderate discussion board threads during your sign-up week.
3. Moderate an in-class discussion group in your sign-up date.
4. Complete a reading narrative describing your deep reading process with one (or more) of the required texts.

Completing one of the four “A” labor assignments will earn you additional 3 points. To earn a grade of “A” (94%), complete 3 out of the 4 “A” labor assignments. To earn an “A-” (91%), complete 2 out of the 4 “A” labor assignments. To earn a “B+” (88%), complete 1 out of the 4 “A” labor assignments.

**Propose your own “A” labor project:** You are welcome to propose your own “A” labor project. You need to discuss your project with me and get it approved no later than May 3rd, Friday of Week 5. If you decide to do your own “A” labor project, you don’t need to do the above three “A” labor assignments.
**Exemplary Labor:** If by our final assignment deadline during Finals Week, you miss no class sessions, participate in all activities, have no late, incomplete, and ignored assignments, and have not exercised the clemency clause, then you will earn additional 3 points. That is, your course grade will increase by 1/3, e.g. from a B to a B+. I don’t give A+ grades.

**Grade Book Examples:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quizzes</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Midterm</th>
<th>Final</th>
<th>Average of required assignments</th>
<th>A Labor: Moderate Discussion Threads</th>
<th>A Labor: Moderate an In-class Discussion Group</th>
<th>A Labor: Two Tutoring Sessions</th>
<th>A Labor: Reading Narrative</th>
<th>Exemplary Work</th>
<th>Final Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91.75 (A-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>85 (B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Clemency Clause:** A student may request clemency for any reason that is related to rare and unusual circumstances out of their control, but only once in the term. The clemency plea is NOT an “opt out clause” for anyone who happens to not fulfill the course requirements in some way.

My job is to make sure that whatever agreement we come to will not be unfair to others in class. I will decide in consultation with the student whether clemency is warranted. The student must come to me as soon as possible, usually before they are unable to meet the course requirements, so that we can determine an equitable arrangement, one that will be fair to all in the class and still meet the university’s expectations for attendance, conduct, and workload.