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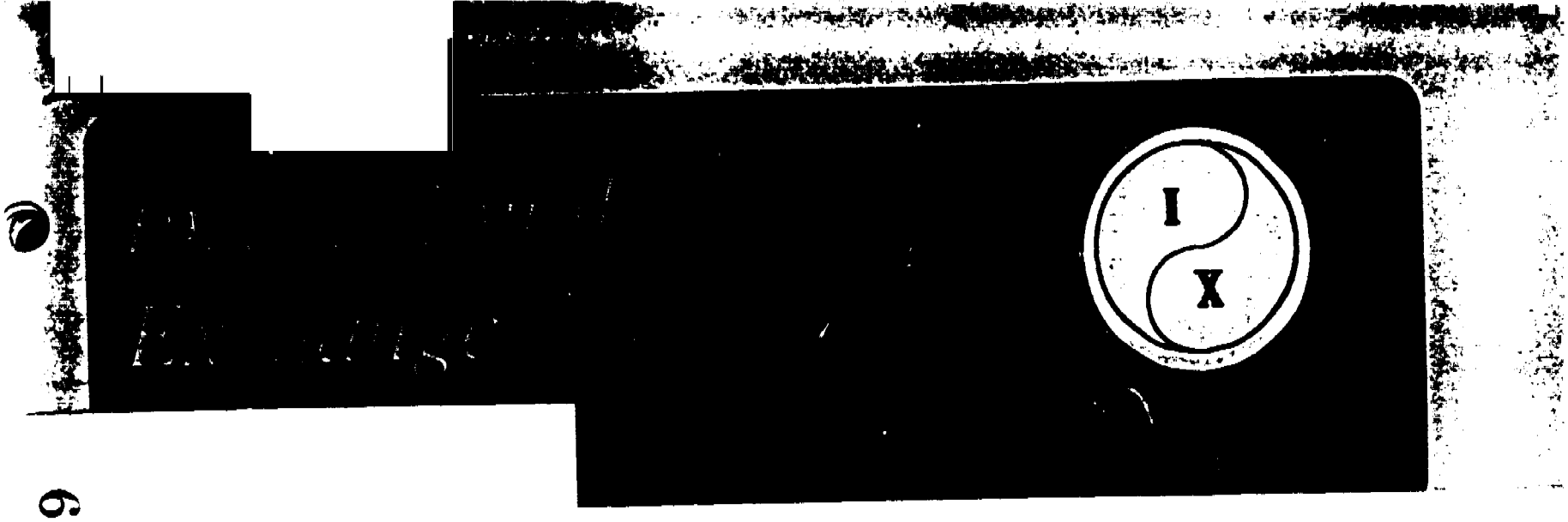
ABSTRACT

This document consists of six issues of a newsletter that provides a forum for the sharing of research findings and instructional strategies by faculty of Western Michigan University. Issue Number 1 addresses writing in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program with notification of a faculty workshop, hints on how to encourage good writing, and a discussion of plagiarism. Issue Number 2 examines cheating and other unethical classroom behaviors. This issue covers cheating prevention tips, penalty scales, and definitions of various types of cheating. Issue Number 3 continues a discussion of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program by addressing essay question design with several examples and a discussion of how to grade responses. Issue Number 4 explores uses for the computer in enhancing or assisting writing instruction through electronic mail and in overcoming writer's block. Issue Number 5 takes up grading and grade criteria including a review of Western Michigan University's policies, tips on weighing components and comments by individual faculty members. The final issue treats the value and meaning of grades, helping students monitor performance, and comments from individual faculty on how they structure grade assignment. (JB)



VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1-6, SEPTEMBER 1990 MARCH 1991

Instructional Exchange

Writing As It Occurs In Every Classroom

A recent headline in The Chronicle announced that "more and more professors in many academic disciplines routinely require students to do extensive writing" (Watkins, 1989, p. A13). This is not news to WMU faculty whose interest in improving student writing has been strong since at least 1982 when the Intellectual Skills Program offered the first Writing Across the Curriculum Institute. Since then, several hundred faculty have attended one or another of these annual events and have gone on to develop "writing-intensive" courses or to revise existing courses to include more and/or different kinds of writing experiences for students.

In 1988, the Faculty Senate approved a proposal to make a baccalaureate-level writing course a graduation requirement. Each academic department now offers one or more courses designated "writing-intensive" and designed to offer the student several opportunities to write in a disciplinary context. The Senate approval criteria for these courses require that they: (1) integrate several writing tasks into the term's work, (2) have writing comprise a significant portion of the course, and (3) have evaluation of the writing comprise a significant portion of the student's grade. This requirement is in addition to the freshman writing course, also required of all students.

By instituting such a requirement, WMU committed itself to the ideals of a "writing across the curriculum" program, an approach very different from one that would require, say, an upper-division course taught by the English department or a uniform test of some sort. The English and other departments that teach freshman writing provide a solid foundation upon which every other department builds. Students know now that expectations for good writing do not end at the close of the freshman composition course; they begin there.

Those of you who are interested in introducing more writing into your current classes, even if they are not part of the new writing-intensive upper-division classes, may be interested in attending a Writing - Across-the-Curriculum workshop.

The 1990-91 Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Workshops for faculty teaching writing-intensive courses will be offered on Wednesday, October 31,1990, and Friday, January 25, 1991, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in room 228 Moore Hall.

The workshop will review methods and materials for developing a writing-intensive course. Faculty currently teaching these courses are invited to share their expertise with colleagues. Registration is required. For further information about the workshop, phone 387-4411.

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Writing Hints

Faculty want good writing; faculty expect good writing. Unless students write and write often, however, faculty probably will not get good writing. Skills may atrophy without practice. But how can a well-meaning faculty member do much to improve writing without increasing exponentially the number of papers brought home each weekend? Three guidelines may help: keep it short, do not grade every piece of writing, and do not edit.

KEEP IT SHORT

Although the research paper is important and appropriate in many courses, one long term paper will probably not do as much to improve student writing as will several short pieces. A long paper delivered at the end of the term does not provide opportunities for revision or for demonstration, on the next paper, that faculty comments have had any effect. Frequent one- or two-page papers, on the other hand, give students needed practice and give faculty opportunities for frequent feedback and monitoring of improvement.

Other formats also improve writing and subject-matter learning without a major increase in workload. Chapter or article summaries on a 5 x 7 index card or on one page are worth a try, as are before or after class lecture or note summaries in paragraph form. Note summaries not only allow students to practice writing, but also allow faculty the opportunity to check for misunderstanding of the concepts. Journals are another option; they need to be checked only once or twice a term. Students can review each other's short papers in five minutes of class time, commenting on such qualities as accuracy and clarity. Study groups should be encouraged to use written products to initiate discussions.

DO NOT GRADE EVERY PIECE OF WRITING

In fact, every writing task probably should not be graded. Journals, for example, are either done or not done; in-class summaries, comments, counter-arguments, additional examples and the like need not be graded, although it might be wise to call on a few students at random to read their work aloud for comment. The idea is to provide plenty of practice so that the work that is graded will be of high quality.

DO NOT EDIT

Just as every piece of writing need not be graded, every bit of writing need not be "corrected" either. Many faculty feel obliged to assume the role of editor for students' papers, correcting every spelling, comma, or agreement error, adding or deleting words, rephrasing whole sentences, or even rearranging the location of entire paragraphs. While these revisions often need to be made, the task of revision should be the student's not the professor's. If a paper is in need of drastic revision, return it to the student with written comments or instructions for resubmission; provide guidelines, but avoid doing editorial work for the student.

Be generous with your written comments, pointing out the nature of errors as well as the strengths of a particular passage. A comment such as "A — GOOD JOB" can frustrate a good student almost as much as "D+ — NEEDS WORK" can depress a weak student, and neither student will have learned how to improve subsequent writings. Comments such as "GOOD EXAMPLE: ORIGINAL AND CONCRETE" or "WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE FOR THIS GENERALIZATION" go far toward reinforcing critical thinking and pointing out argumentative flaws. Comments such as these require the student to revise and rethink. The next written product should benefit from the revision.

This article has stressed the importance of writing frequently and has offered some suggestions on how to increase the frequency of student writing without increasing faculty paperwork as well as suggestions for the kind of evaluative comments that will bring about improved student writing. If space permits, future issues of I/X will feature sample assignments from across the curriculum, sample evaluation guide sheets, and suggestions for constructing essay

About Instructional Exchange

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About Plagiarism

Many students don't seem to realize that using another writer's words, sentences, phrases, or paragraphs is plagiarism. Any product derived from an existing source and neither acknowledged nor cited is an act or instance of plagiarism. University faculty are highly concerned about the questionable authorship of some students' term papers.

The lack of understanding of what plagiarism is and when a paper is plagiarized needs some discussion in the classroom before assigning a paper. Faculty must explain ownership of written words and ideas to help students to value their own papers (Jackson et al., 1988). The discussion of acceptable versus unacceptable documentation may discourage students from committing the act of plagiarism.

A 1984 survey administered to 425 undergraduate students by Hawley and reported in Improving College & University Teaching asked about student attitudes toward plagiarism. The study claims that as many as 75% of all respondents said that plagiarism is wrong for them and for others, and 25% considered plagiarism an acceptable behavior. The results are encouraging since respondents admitted the existence of the behavior and overall a negative attitude toward the act. Planned plagiarism is, therefore, not committed by a majority of students. Instances may be due to a lack of understanding, but 25% is still unacceptable.

Here are several suggestions to consider in dealing with plagiarism in the classroom:

Discuss early in the course the use of paraphrasing, acceptable and unacceptable documentation, and the methods of appropriate citations and quotations in the written text.

Keep the required paper as short as possible.

Ask for preliminary bibliographies early in the semester.

Require the student to submit an abstract of the paper to other classmates and orally brief the class on the content of a paper or the results of an investigation.

Change assignments regularly or change main themes of papers every time you teach the course.

Use a very narrow definition of topics for written assignments.

Indicate a specific style manual to use for proper format for documentation.

"The university system must strive not to eradicate plagiarism by threat, but to dissipate it by the creation of new attitudes" (Hawley, 1984, p.39).

Reports on plagiarism suggest that students sometimes use a previous research paper as a new paper. The question raised here is to what extent is submitting a paper for the second time plagiarism?.

Faculty should explain to students early in the semester the extent to which a student's previous study may be used as a new writing product. Clarifying content area and being very specific about it may help in a student's decision about using an old paper.

In many teaching situations faculty may work with students using a previous research paper. Some examples may be:

1. Using a different statistical approach in analyzing the data collected from a previous research.

2. Advising students to write themes only on specified topics in their field.

3. Using conclusions of previous papers to lead to research topics for new papers.

Resubmitting previous academic work needs explanation and discussion in the classroom. This procedure may be considered carefully.

We would like suggestions to be shared in the Exchange Board.

EXCHANGE BOARD

In the last issue of I/X, Volume 1, contained a questionnaire asking for feedback on and suggestions for the newsletter. Some faculty suggested a discussion of Team Teaching as an instructional strategy would be helpful. One professor wrote that "one of the most problematic but potentially useful means of generating excitement in a topic is team teaching". Another comment we received, on the same item, suggested inviting visitors to the class as team teaching members. Anyone with suggestions about team teaching or visiting speakers is invited to send material into the EXCHANGE BOARD.

The 1990-91 volume of I/X will have as a theme writing instruction across the curriculum at WMU. There may be experiences among readers, related to the issues in this volume, that may be helpful to other faculty. If you don't want to write an entire article, the EXCHANGE BOARD may be just the place for your comments and contributions.

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Help in Writing

The Academic Skills Center offers tutoring in writing for undergraduate students only. The Writing Lab is located in 1039 Moore Hall. Students may be referred for writing help in two different ways: a professor referral or self referral. The referral may result in a regular one-hour-a-week tutoring session or a drop-in session. However, students should be aware that appointments must be made a week in advance for drop-in sessions. Tutoring is available from September 17 to December 7. Tutors can work with students on redrafting papers for any class.

The lab hours are 8:00 am to 8:00 pm Monday through Thursday and 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on Friday.

If you have any questions, call 387-4442.

Documenting Sources

The Student Rights and Responsibilities expressed in the WMU Undergraduate 1989-1991 Catalog defines plagiarism as part of academic dishonesty. The guide requires documenting sources of direct quotations and paraphrasing, and acknowledging inclusion of information which is not common knowledge.

Students may protect themselves against charges of plagiarism by documenting correctly the references used in any research paper. The examples below will help to clarify differences among common knowledge, quotations, and paraphrasing.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Research is an important activity in any science.

QUOTATION

"Theory, conceptualization, and empirical activity are interwoven in a contextual operation such that theory guides research while research guides theory" (Denzin, 1970, p. 56).

PARAPHRASING

Investigating particular theories in the sciences require structured research studies (Denzin, 1970).

Work Cited

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Instructional Exchange

I X

Academic Dishonesty in Our Classrooms

This issue is dedicated to a discussion of cheating in response to several requests from faculty last year to open a dialogue about cheating.

We all agree that cheating is wrong. We all agree that it is not acceptable behavior and should not be attempted or should be prevented. We hope that the material in this issue goes beyond what we all agree to and opens the door for some dialogue among faculty.

For years the level of academic dishonesty has remained fairly constant in our educational settings. Now integrity of higher educational institutions is at risk. Cheating is touching our classrooms. Cheating is defined in the WMU Undergraduate 1989-1991 Catalog as "intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise (p.50)". The guide defines as cheating behaviors: material aids used in an exam, external help in preparing or conducting research, and resubmitting partial sections of a term paper. These behaviors are described as acceptable only with instructor authorization.

Contents

Various unethical behaviors are typically defined as cheating. Singhal and Johnson (1983) identified common and extreme forms of cheating. Common forms are copying on examinations, homework and laboratory reports. Extreme forms involve hiring professional writers, passing off the work of others as one's own, purchasing a paper, taking a test for another student, and altering grade books.

Surprisingly, faculty and students do not agree on the definitions of cheating. Students should understand faculty's definition of cheating. Discrepancies between faculty and students related to definitions of cheating should be clarified in the classroom. Barnett and Dalton (1981) found some evidence that cheating means different things for faculty and students. For instance, forming a work group for a specific homework assignment when the instructor does not allow it was not considered as cheating by 52% of students. Fifty-five percent of students thought that failure to document "a few sentences" from a source was not cheating. Forty percent of students indicated that they believed that obtaining previous exams from another student who had taken the class was not cheating.

Many different factors contribute to academic cheating. Barnett and Dalton (1981) provide a list of these factors, as follows.

Stress: test anxiety, family and friends' pressure for good grades, and academic competition are reasons for the high degree of stress that will induce students to behave unethically in the classroom.

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Cheating Prevention Tips

Faculty can make a difference in decreasing the opportunities that facilitate cheating behaviors in the classroom. These are some hints that may help prevent this academic plague:

Placing empty seats between each student may reduce answer copying in large classrooms.

Assigning seats in a test situation may decrease answer copying.

Reorganizing the items of a multiple-choice test, thereby constructing several forms of the test may reduce cheating. Testing Services (Hillside Apt. 7-3809)on campus can easily score multiple forms of a test. Also, printing tests in different colors for crowded classrooms may act as a deterrent.

Constructing essay exams with short and long answers may keep students from looking at another's answer. Usually, multiple choice test answers are easier to copy than essay answers.

Proctoring examinations closely by both instructors and teaching assistants. Don't leave the room unattended! Keep walking around! Have an extra helper in the room!

Reviewing all possible test items that may bring some questioning during the test situation. The time spent responding to student questions may disrupt the testing situation and leave others unattended.

Picking up the test and answer sheets in the sequence of rows. In this way faculty may be aware of a student's answers in case of any suspicious behavior.

Providing students with scratch paper attached to the test to ensure that crib notes are not used.

Checking student identifications prior to starting the test in order to catch any substituted student.

Changing test format by deleting bad items and adding new items every academic period.

Using a Scale for Penalty

An academic atmosphere of high morals and honesty at departmental and institutional levels must be felt and perceived to prevent cheating. The prevention and punishment of cheating behaviors should be the responsibility of the college and the department. Institutional support is important for teachers as well as students. Research studies tend to agree that not all cheating behaviors should be penalized using the same degree of severity.

A Scale for Punishment summarizing retribution for various forms of cheating behaviors was presented by Singhal and Johnson (p.19, 1983) as follows:

0 Cheating evidence discussed informally with the student

1 Verbal warning

2 Assign a grade of zero for particular homework or examination involved

3 Assign grade of zero for all homework assignments or examinations

4 Assign a failing grade ('E') for the course

5 Let cheating conviction, if proved, remain on the student's record for 3 to 5 years

6 Expel from program (student should be given the right to appeal)

7 Expel from the university (student should be given the right to appeal)

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Environment: faculty absent during the test, low probability of institutional sanctions, faculty using the same exam for more than one section of the same class, student attitudes toward others' cheating, and crowded conditions with an inadequate number of proctors are some examples of environmental conditions that affect academic work.

Low and High Achievers: lower grade averages and lower achievers are reported to practice more cheating behaviors. Students doing badly in a class can't rely on themselves and thus are tempted to rely on crib sheets.

Personality characteristics: men cheat more than women, students with a high need for approval cheat more, and younger students have indicated cheating more than older ones. However, personality differences as related to cheating behaviors are inconsistent in the literature.

Misconception of cheating definition: some students cheat because they do not understand that a specific behavior is labeled as cheating. What is right to students seems to be wrong to faculty.

Moral judgment and will: a student who has a high level of moral reasoning does not support cheating attitudes.

Subjects uncertain about their chances of success may engage in relatively heavy cheating in an effort to ensure victory (Houston, 1978, p.758).

Prevention Plan

Singhal and Johnson (1983) developed a plan to prevent cheating. It includes:

1. **Defining** at the first class meeting "the level of student's interaction appropriate for work done out of class and submitted for grading (p.14)". Institutional policy on cheating should be spelled out. Morals and ethics should be included as topics of discussion at the beginning of the class. The definition of cheating should be clarified for international students to control any cultural misconception of the term.

2. **Reviewing** jointly with students old class materials and making them accessible and available to use any time. Thus, students may understand that old assignments or exam questions are useful in getting to know faculty and their teaching approach. Giving students access to previous materials may, for example, contribute to breaking the myth of fear about faculty writing styles regarding item construction on relevant class content.

3. **Decreasing** grade percentages on instructional activities that are to be developed out of class and can't be closely controlled, i.e., take home exams. The tendency to cheat may vary across instructional activities in the semester. It suggests that instructional assignments should be graded in different proportions depending, of course, on their complexity and length. Planning reasonable grade percentages on evaluation strategies that stimulate more in-class assignments may discourage cheating.

4. **Planning** course requirements that are realistic and understandable for students. Course requirements may be a discussion point at the beginning of the semester. A better understanding of what faculty expectations are and what students are to accomplish enhances class environment.

5. **Structuring** examinations "as realistic and as fair as possible (p.14)" and avoiding memorization of a large amount of information regarding dates, locations, formulas, etc. An exam should reflect clearly the course content worked on in class as part of the daily assignments.

6. **Guarding** the security of tests before and after they are administered. Planning a test situation in which cheating is difficult to occur. Storing tests in safe places, supervising closely the reproduction of the tests, and carefully discarding first drafts of the tests may secure the testing situation.

EXCHANGE BOARD

It's been called to our attention that our September lead story about the baccalaureate writing courses added in 1988 was inaccurate. Actually, not all departments have designated one of their classes as writing intensive (so that students can practice writing within their disciplines). At least one of the colleges has designated a single course for all of the students in the col' ge. Consequently, we have some courses which are within a single discipline and some courses which are multidisciplinary in nature.

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TYPES OF CHEATING

Some students think that cheating is only using crib notes when taking an exam. While other actions may be described as questionable, they may not consider them cheating. Below is a list of activities the research literature describes as cheating. How many do you think your students would identify? Do you think each of the items deserves the same penalty?

1. Using crib notes during an exam
2. Copying from another's exam
3. Obtaining a copy of the exam before taking it
4. Obtaining a copy of the previous year's tests
5. Handing in the same product as an assignment in two classes
6. Substituting another student to take exams
7. Purchasing take-home exams from others
8. Purchasing a term paper
9. Drawing formulas, sentences, graphs, etc. on desks, walls, etc.
10. Copying from books
11. Submitting another person's paper as one's own

Instructional Exchange

I X

Guides to Writing Essay Questions

To continue examining aspects of writing-across-the-curriculum, the 1990 I/X theme, we turn now to a discussion of writing essay questions for students.

Just as multiple choice tests are misrepresented by the description "multiple guess," essay tests are often criticized as being too subjective. Students complain that they can't tell what the professor is looking for in the answer. The guidelines presented below refer only to the construction of the test itself. (Hopkins & Antes, 1990)

Preparing essay examinations requires as many decisions as multiple choice tests. Time saved in construction is expended in correcting the test. To construct an essay examination, the instructor must select appropriate content, determine the length of item responses, and apply objective grading procedures.

1. Avoid using vague, broad, or ambiguous terminology that could lead to several interpretations. Be as specific as you can in focusing the topic of the item. The terms used in essay questions should be very clear to the reader. Double interpretations should be avoided by using simple and direct language. A well structured item leads to a specific response. The item writer should narrow and focus the topic by leading the student to use specific content and then measuring what is intended. An example of the possible effects of applying this rule:

FIRST DRAFT: Name the principles which determine American policy.

EDITED VERSION: Describe three principles on which American foreign policy was based between 1945 and 1960; illustrate each of the principles with two actions of the executive branch of the government.

Notice that the question, now focused specifically on foreign policy, not only gives the number of principles which should be given in the answer, but also gives the time period which should be addressed. Additionally, the request for illustrations of the principles makes this response more than a matter of simple rote memory.

2. Do not write questions that require only memorization, e.g., name the presidents of U.S. in the last two decades. Students tend to memorize the course content rather than comprehend facts or applications. Essay items are good producers of more related information. Multiple choice items may be more appropriate when you want to check for knowledge of facts. Provide in the question, for example, dates or places in which an event happened, and ask for their importance, instead.

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FIRST DRAFT: Name the independent and dependent variable in the Jacobs' study.

EDITED VERSION: In 1960 Jacobs tried to show that children could be taught social skills. Describe the way in which he measured social skills and give two arguments against its validity.

Notice that in the editing, the professor decided it was more important to concentrate on the dependent variable in the response. Also the general characteristics of the study are given in the questions so that students aren't confused about which Jacobs study to analyze.

3. Structured questions should produce clear responses that are easy to grade. The formulation of the item should guide a student to choose the correct and precise approach in responding to it. Details may be spelled out. For instance, shapes, colors, materials, etc., are elements that may be delineated.

FIRST DRAFT: Tell about the life stages of the house fly.

EDITED VERSION: List each of the stages of the life of the house fly. For each stage indicate its duration, the size of the animal, its color, its major means of locomotion, and its food supply.

Notice that the edited version clearly specifies that the life stages are to be discussed in chronological order and that each should contain five elements that may be delineated.

4. Clarify to the student terminology used in the question. Indicate whether the student should define or explain the terms in the response. Stating clearly the type of response sought permits objective scoring.

FIRST DRAFT: What is a control group?

EDITED VERSION: According to Campbell and Stanley, a control group serves three specific functions. Briefly describe an experiment which has a control group. Explain how the control group in your design performs the three functions specified by Campbell and Stanley.

Notice that in editing, the professor decided that it was more important to have the students show what a control group was, according to a specific authority. The first draft of the item was a recall of definition which can be addressed faster and simpler with a multiple choice test.

5. Do not use directions starting with "Review," "Tell all you know." Wording is important. Expressions like "review" imply broad and multiple responses to the same item. "Tell all you know" may be answered with simple regurgitation. The student will not differentiate between important concepts and trivial facts.

FIRST DRAFT: Write an analysis of the poem.

EDITED VERSION: Describe the way in which the structure of the poem reinforces the speaker's mood as it is presented in lines 9 to 14. In your essay show how the attitude in the first part of the poem is related to the mood at the end of the poem.

Notice how the edited version describes what the professor means by the word *analysis*.

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Guides to Writing ..... Continued from page 2

6. Use short-answer format items. In writing short-answer items "make sure that the questions can be answered with a simple or unique phrase or word and that there is only one correct answer" (Bloom et al., 1981, p.188). Not all questions have to call for analysis. Short-answer formats are excellent when you are concerned about guessing in a multiple choice format or when you are developing new multiple choice items. The student developed wrong answers will serve as excellent foils in the new multiple choice items.

"Every time students write, they individualize instruction; the act of silent writing, even for five minutes, generates ideas, observations, emotions. Regular writing makes it harder for students to remain passive" (Fulwiler, 1980, p. 16).

Being as Objective as Possible

The professor who writes the item is the most appropriate person to judge the answer given. However, some responses may be read by graduate assistants or others. While such graders are qualified, the professor must take pains to guide them in their judgments. The subjectivity of the grader is always present in scoring essay responses. High reliability in scoring an essay item can be reached by developing a set of clear procedures that allow efficient and clear measurement. Some recommendations are in this issue:

Write a detailed outline of the correct response or alternative elements of the correct response. The model response should show the minimum requirement for a judgment of correct. DO NOT CHANGE THE MODEL AFTER YOU READ THE TEST PAPER OF YOUR BEST STUDENT. Construct the model before you administer the test, not during the test. You may find that some questions are unclear as you do this exercise.

Indicate on the answer key the use of different criteria for each element. Usually, items ask for different content. The relevance of the content can be weighed. For instance, if a question asked for 4 major reasons with 2 examples of each reason, the reasons may be worth 4 points each with one point for each relevant example. The total possible points for this question is 16 plus 8 or 24. Decide ahead of time whether you will give points for a correct statement of the reason if both of the examples are wrong. If the examples must be correct, then the item really has 4 parts each worth 6 points. Students complain when they have lost points because they followed directions while someone who gave no examples got the 4 points.

Scoring the response to a single item on all tests at one time will keep consistency in judgment. After reading 25 sets of answers, it is sometimes difficult to remember what you wanted in question one. Grading all items at the same time could increase subjectivity. A student may have written a good response to a specific item but an unacceptable response to another one. Faculty might tend to grade the test in general, instead of considering the good response in particular. This means that the format of the responses should be considered, e.g., each item begins on a separate sheet.

Do not stop scoring. Try to grade all of the responses to a single question in one sitting. Time differences or a particular event may influence grading objectivity.

Separate correction of writing elements such as grammar, punctuation, expression, accuracy of writing, etc., from the content required in answering the item. Making a guideline for scoring the above elements may facilitate the grading system. Don't waste time editing the writing. Develop simple codes to indicate to students the error committed.

Construct a Student Response Score Sheet which you may use to record the scores for each item. This procedure would avoid writing point values on the test in case of any needed change. You may want to use a pencil, followed by a pen. **DO NOT RETURN PAPERS THAT CAN BE EASILY ALTERED BY THE STUDENTS.** We have all started out with an erroneous key at some point in our teaching careers. Be prepared to go through some portion of the papers again.

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EXCHANGE BOARD

One reader sent us a recent article from The Chronicle which reported that "faculty members must make pedagogy a subject of scholarly debate" (Watkins, 1990, p. A11). It went on to say that we had to have time to talk about more than parking and TIAA/CREF -- which currently is all we have in common. A note attached to the article said in part: "On our campus we are seeing more discussion of teaching than ever before, but it seems to me to be superficial. It is always in relation to research, rather than about aspects of teaching. Let's take advantage of the teaching-research debate with some real discussion of teaching."

From another reader..."can't help but repeat to you the old saying (the source of which is unfortunately lost) that copying from one source is cheating; copying from 2 or more sources is research."

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Help in Writing

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If you have any questions, call 387-4442.

Being as Objective .... Continued from page 3

The Student Response Score Sheet may have space for comments, feedback, and recommendations. Feedback on the response is highly appreciated by students who look for clear statements on the judgment of their work. Recommendations are good motivators to increase student awareness of their failure.

More than one test reader is always desirable. If you work in teams, the provision of two or more opinions in an answer may increase reliability of the scoring.

Read some papers twice to check on your use of the model response. Be sure to do it at two different times. It will help decrease subjectivity on the scoring procedure. You will feel better when you hand back the papers.

Impartiality seems to be an underlying objective in any test situation. Faculty make strong efforts to control their subjectivity in scoring tests of any type, particularly essay examinations. In accomplishing this internal process, some external conditions may help to ensure that each student gets what he or she deserves depending on the response given.

REMEMBER

WRITING-ACROSS-THE-CURRICULUM

WORKSHOP

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 1991

3:00 TO 5:00 P.M.

228 MOORE HALL

CALL 387-4411 FOR RESERVATIONS

Instructional Exchange

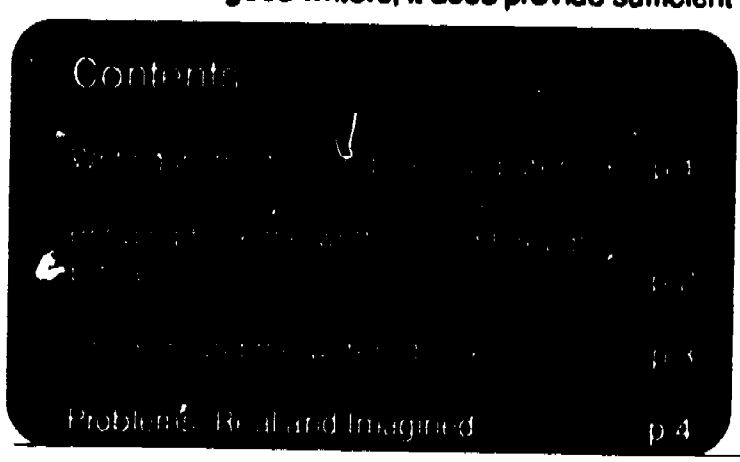
Writing Instruction and the Computer

by
Joel P. Bowman

Much of the recent research on using computers to teach writing has centered on comparing the quality of text produced on a computer to the quality of that produced by hand or with a typewriter. Such comparisons miss the point of using computers to write and of having students use computers in their writing classes. The quality of writing does not depend so much on the tool being used to produce words on paper as it does on the quality of mind and skill of the person using the tool.

Replacing the typewriter with a computer is the same *kind* of change that took place when the typewriter replaced the pen as the means of putting words on paper. Because the tool itself does not alter the quality of mind of the user or change his or her skill level, we should not look to the computer to improve the quality of writing produced by those using one. Poor thinking and poor writing will remain poor whether the tool is a pen, typewriter, or computer. If that's the case, why bother with computers?

Although the computer will not automatically turn bad writers into good writers, it does provide sufficient advantages over previous writing tools to merit its use in all writing-intensive classes. First, the computer facilitates revision, which helps instructors emphasize the importance of revising as a part of the process of writing. Second, the computer encourages students to write more than they would otherwise, and while longer is certainly not the equivalent of better, students do benefit from the additional practice. Finally, the computer is clearly emerging as the dominant tool for creating written documents, and students need to be comfortable with its use.



For the past six years, I have been having my students use microcomputers (either MS-DOS or Macintosh, depending on their preference) for the letters, memos, and reports they produce in BIS 340 Writing for Business. Additionally, I have them use the University's VAX cluster to complete tutorials and take quizzes and exams (including modules on English grammar and usage) on the PASS program. They are also responsible for sending E-mail messages and for participating in BUSCOM, an electronic conference.

As students gain confidence in using the computer, they also gain confidence in their writing and become willing to revise material they recognize as needing work. Because it is easy to move a paragraph or to insert a transitional sentence, students are willing to work with a document until they are happy with it. The computer may not improve student writing directly, but it does so indirectly--and sometimes that makes all the difference.

Joel P. Bowman is a Professor in the Department of Business Information Systems. He began his career at Western Michigan University in 1975. He received his doctorate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Bringing Back the Written Word through E-mail

by
John P. Flynn

There are many useful media through which instructors and students can communicate -- in class, on the phone, during office hour visits, or just walking across campus. Two-way communication between faculty and students is essential to the learning process. Many professors search for ways to enhance the opportunities for contact with students. Some communicate through electronic mail on the VAX, often referred to as E-mail. E-mail has been shown to be effective as a supplemental means of communication for those with large classes, for communicating with students who are infrequently on campus (e.g., doctoral students), with those in practica or field internships, for those at continuing education sites, and for those on campus who find that writing for communication by electronic means can be satisfying.

E-mail works something like VoiceMail on the telephone in that the users can avoid some of the frustration of having to catch the person in a game like telephone tag. The system allows the student or the faculty member to initiate contact 24 hours a day and the other party can respond whenever it is convenient. Thus, a faculty member can have unlimited office hours. E-mail provides benefits beyond voice communication, however, such as providing the ability to practice written communication, allowing the person sending the message to send "carbon copies" to interested parties, to forward entire memos or papers to one person or a group, or to file away particularly interesting communications and subsequently edit or somehow alter those files with a word processor or editor. There are other examples.

The ability to file away messages allows a professor to review the kind of messages or questions that students have. Review of the messages can be used immediately in class to begin a discussion of a misconception that students may have. Review of the questions can also provide some helpful areas for course revision at the end of the term. The file of comments and questions is more accurate and much easier to use than reconstructing conversations during office hours. The ability to send multiple copies allows a professor to communicate with the entire class at once. Corrections in assignments or comments on misprints in the textbook no longer have to wait for the next class meeting.

To use E-mail, all the instructor or student needs is an account on the VAX, easily obtained at Academic Computing Services (387-5430). If a person already has an account on the VAX, he types MAIL at the monitor prompt ($), and go to it. Easy-to-read help documents are available at all public computing sites on campus. And, of course, the sender and the receiver can use E-mail anywhere in the world where one has access to a modem and a telephone or a MERIT connection, the network that connects many universities and cities in Michigan in a communications network. Beyond that, one can connect with the whole world through a variety of networks. The connections through the networks to other University computing facilities provide faculty with a faster and cheaper way to communicate with co-authors. Colleagues with access to a similar facility can "hard copy" communicate with each other without the delays of the U.S. mails and with no long distance phone charges.

John P. Flynn is the Associate Director for Instructional Computing of Academic Computing Services and a Professor in the School of Social Work. He began his career at Western Michigan University in 1970. He received his doctorate at the University of Denver.

About Instructional Exchange

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Once Around the Writer's Block

by
Lisamarie Babik

Western Michigan University takes great pride in the broad spectrum of backgrounds of its student population. This provides many opportunities for students to interact with and learn from a population they normally would not encounter. While students have writing skills as varied as their backgrounds, some may find that they may need a little boost to finish their papers. This is where the writing lab steps in.

Many students have preconceived ideas about what tutoring is all about. Their heads may be filled with thoughts of hours spent with a pencil and pad of paper with tutors standing over their shoulders as they struggle to turn out the 500 word essay that is due tomorrow. Fortunately, when students enter the lab, it is obvious that writing has entered the computer age. Although pencils and paper have not become obsolete, they definitely have some new competition.

The writing lab first introduced computers into tutoring in 1988. Although at the beginning tutors and students were somewhat wary of using computers, they soon learned the benefits that computers could provide. Using Word Perfect 5.0, they could correct spelling errors with a single keystroke and move around entire blocks of text within the document. There was no need to worry about having a uniform format for page numbering, line spacing, or margins because the computer handled it automatically in one step. Best of all, word processing meant that making these sorts of changes to a paper did not mean spending innumerable hours retyping the paper. With a single keystroke, the entire paper could be reprinted within minutes. The marriage of computers and writing was off to a beautiful start.

What started as a word processing adventure has blossomed into a full-fledged writing experience. The lab still uses Word Processing 5.0 as its primary word processing package, but it has also expanded its software library to include Norton Textra, Grammatik IV, and Writer's Helper Stage II, with plans to continue expanding. Each of these tools complements the writing process and eases the pains of writing in a variety of ways.

Norton Textra is the lab's secondary word processing package. Although it seems Word Perfect could do most of the functions a student would need, Norton Textra has some added features that set it apart. The most outstanding is the online grammar handbook which allows the student to select the type of information needed, ranging from passive voice to MLA and APA citation styles, without having to leave the computer. This program is also "user friendly" in that it is entirely menu driven, with the possible selections displayed at the bottom of the screen.

As a final check of grammar, students and tutors may use Grammatik IV directly from Word Perfect 5.0. The program can be set to check business, informal, fiction, or technical writing styles. It also lets the writer include or exclude certain characteristics, such as passive voice, from the check. When the program has finished running, it provides a series of readability statistics that includes grade level (Flesch-Kincaid), reading ease (Flesch), percentage of passive voice, average sentence length, average word length, and average paragraph length.

All packages mentioned above are to help students write a paper when they already know what they want to say. What if a student does not have a topic, or is not sure how to go about writing it? That is when Writer's Helper Stage II enters the writing process. Writer's Helper is a series of prewriting activities that aim at helping a student find a topic, begin writing about it, and then organize the ideas into the beginnings of a paper. Although activities may seem absurd at first, such as comparing the topic to a potted plant, the application of others, such as "three ways of seeing," are more readily apparent.

What the lab has accomplished in the last three years is the marriage of creativity and technology. Although these two fields were formally thought incompatible, the writing lab has proven that it can work, and work successfully.

Lisamarie Babik has been a student coordinator in the Writing Lab since 1988. She is a senior majoring in computer science.

EXCHANGE BOARD

CONTRIBUTE YOUR OPINIONS TO THE FEBRUARY ISSUE !!!!

The February issue of I/X will discuss elements of grading systems used around the University. We are not searching for the perfect system; we just want some dialogue. While we plan to interview some faculty about their rationales for using or not using some criteria, we would like to have all faculty contribute opinions. Our plan is to discuss the pros and cons of grading elements. **Please tell us how you feel about:**

1) Using attendance as an explicit component of course grades.

2) Balancing the percentage of the grade achieved by objective means with subjective components.

3) Balancing the percentage of the grade achieved by documentation of knowledge or scholarship components with documentation of performance components.

4) Balancing the percentage of the grade achieved by unit examinations with a comprehensive final examination.

5) Balancing the percentage of the grade based on lectures with material from the textbook.

6) Anything you consider critically important in grading or trivial to the assessment of student knowledge.

Problems: Real and Imagined

In Lessons Learned from FIPSE Projects, a number of project directors identified two major problems with using computers on campus. The first problem is the access ratio of students to computers or faculty to computers. The demand for workstations continues to exceed supply on all campuses in the country. Until access to the technology improves, it is unlikely students will use the computer. The lack of use may be attributable to faculty who are reticent about requiring the use when access is difficult or it may be students themselves who don't want to stand in lines. Using E-mail, obviously, requires that the faculty member have easy access to a VAX terminal so that a "mailbox" can be checked whenever the faculty member has time. If the terminal is in another building or available only in the department office, it is unlikely that E-mail will work. The major premise of E-mail is that it provides easy access for immediate response.

The second major problem remains hardware/software incompatibility. Not only is it difficult to select software which appears to have all of the bells and whistles you want and need for your classroom, but also it is difficult for students to easily move from one system to another. This latter point may be characterized as the software/human compatibility problem. Early in their experience with computers students develop an affinity for the Macintosh system or the IBM system and find it difficult to move from one to another. The affinity doesn't present a problem until they are required to use a system that they do not like.

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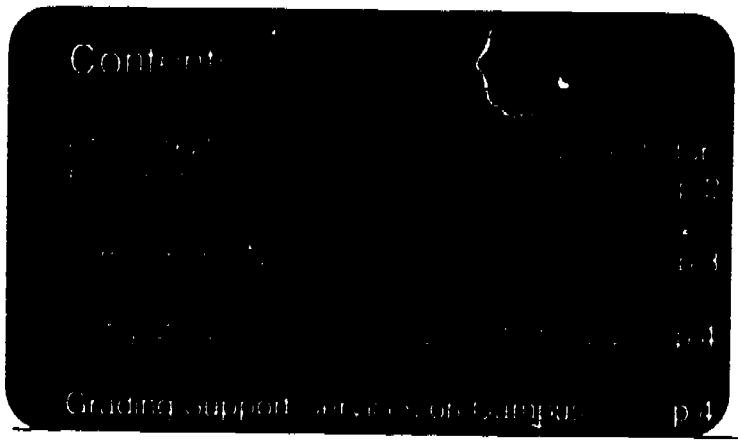
Instructional Exchange

I X

Grade assignment and grading criteria

The selection and application of criteria by an instructor in the assignment of grades are two of the most important professional decisions a faculty member can make as a teacher. Of course, the process of teaching involves the presentation and selection of material. But it also involves feedback to the students concerning how well they have learned the material. Grades communicate to students how well they have met our expectations. The vehicles used in the assignment of grades, i.e., exams, papers, projects, and presentations, all inform students about how well they have learned the material. Evaluation techniques used during the class inform both the faculty member and the student about the need to review material. Intermediate grades serve a private function within the course. Final grades serve a somewhat different function. Recorded grades on transcripts communicate to outside audiences our assessment of what a student knows. The grade is at once a public and private statement about student learning. Do all A's mean the same thing? Probably not.

The grading criteria used in any individual course clearly relate to the objectives of the course and the professional judgment of the faculty member. We cannot suggest that there is one right way to assign grades. Grading practices in upper division courses differ from those in lower division courses. Courses with laboratory experiences have different objectives than those without labs. Thus, we would like to close this academic year with a discussion of the range of criteria that might be used in a course and how faculty have applied those criteria to match the objectives of the course. This issue is half of the story as we see it. Our hope is that faculty will consider these issues as they revise syllabi for next year and begin dialogue with each other concerning the selection of criteria for grades. This month we will consider components of the final grade, such as attendance and participation. Next month we will look at the various options for assessing student learning, i. e., unit examinations, final examinations, and papers. We are going to miss some issues that are important. Let us know about it. We will try to represent all points of view.



Western Michigan University has a limited set of policies which apply to the assignment of grades. Two are central to our work with students. The criteria by which grades will be assigned must be specified in the syllabus and each course must have a comprehensive final examination. However, the influence of the final exam on the grade and the set of criteria specified in the syllabus are left to the discretion of the faculty member.

The policies of the University may not richly describe how faculty think about giving grades. However, several faculty have provided I/X with thoughtful discussion of a number of criteria. This month we will consider the use of attendance and participation in the calculation of the overall course grade. These comments are provided in an extended Exchange Board on page 3.

Choosing the most appropriate components for final grades

Defensible components of a grading system are those that the faculty member has deemed valuable. Strategies used in the assignment of grades represent personal and departmental values. A number of sources have suggestions for weighing components (Neff & Weimer (1990), Ory (1990), and Frisbie et al. (1979)). However, the instructor must have a rationale for the weights used in a course that is professionally satisfying far beyond any plea to authority.

1) How many components should be considered in the assignment of a final grade?

While there is no perfect number of components, each component does add to the knowledge base of the instructor in the assignment of the final grade. The larger the sample of student behavior is, the more confident an instructor can be that his or her overall judgment is accurate and appropriate. Grades based on a single component -- final examination or paper -- can misrepresent the achievement of a student.

2) What sorts of options are there to consider as components?

The range of options for components of grades is limited only by the objectives of instruction and the values of an individual faculty member. Any evaluative technique which an instructor can defend in terms of the objectives of instruction can be used. The technique should give information to the instructor and the student regarding progress. While some departments may have disciplinary standards which faculty choose to embrace, others may not comment on grading at all. The latter may lead to variation within the department. Grading standard variation in the department should be reviewed on a somewhat regular basis. Discussion of acceptable standards within the department is particularly important as new faculty are oriented to departmental procedures.

3) What are some common elements used in grading?
   a) Final examinations -- which by university policy must be comprehensive.
   b) Unit examinations
   c) Chapter or weekly quizzes
   d) Class participation or formal presentations
   e) Attendance, either in class or at special events
   f) Class projects
   g) Term papers
   h) Logs of reading assignments
   i) Abstracts of readings
   j) Homework problems

A rule of thumb is if you want students to perform an activity it had better be related to your grading system.

4) How do you know how much weight to assign to a component?

A number of different factors must be considered when assigning weights to course components:
   a) The final examination which comprehensively covers the objectives of the course should be a major component, (30% to 40%).
   b) If cheating is likely to be a significant problem in the class, in-class activities should count more than out-of-class activities because you can guarantee that the in-class activities are a student's own work.
   c) If the course is designated as "writing intensive," written projects and papers should account for a major component of the grade.
   d) Attendance and participation may be factors in all final grade calculations or may be used only for people who are on the borderline between grades.

5) Why should I waste class time with weekly quizzes?

True, quizzes take up class time, but they provide students with timely feedback about their understanding of the material. Without the quizzes students may not recognize poor learning of the material. Or they may not keep pace with the presentation and fall so far behind the rest of the class that failure is guaranteed after the first few weeks of class.

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The Exchange Board

ATTENDANCE

Why use it as a criterion in the final grade?

I use attendance, class participation and timeliness of submitting assignments in my final calculation of grades as I believe that our young people in the schools are desperately in need of good role models.
Name withheld by request

I believe we have a responsiblity to **train** as well as **educate** our young engineering students. Therefore, attendance and punctuality are fundamental to our grading schemes.
Name withheld by request

Why might it be used for some class activities?

If one assumes the content and experiences within the classroom are significant and valuable then attendance also is significant and presumably valuable. Student backgrounds, learning styles and capabilities, however, are so variable that mere physical presence is not deemed to be worth the hassle of formally recording attendance and imposition of sanctions for non-attendance. It would not be difficult, on the other hand, to demonstrate a relationship between attendance and success in graded aspects of introductory courses. Attendance in laboratory is more stringently monitored since these are unique experiences not readily replicated. A grade of zero is recorded for work missed unless it is made up under strict limitations.
Donald Brown -- Chemistry

Why is it not used?

I do not use attendance because it would be a double penalty; the student already suffers from not receiving class instruction.
Werner Sichel -- Economics

I don't feel that the seniors I teach need someone "in loco parentis." If they can get an A in my class with 50% attendance, they get an A. They don't have to be good, just smart.
Name withheld by request

PARTICIPATION

Why should it be a component of the final grade?

I believe we ought to be developing managers, not just teaching people about management. One might consider what we do (in developing managers) as "accelerated experience." They must do something so ... participation. The extent of participation depends on the course (and the delivery system). For most courses, vis-a-vis written communication, 15% of their final score is taken from an electronic conference. Of this 15% they get some points for just logging in regularly (enough to get a D). The rest of the points are assigned for actual activity, judged for quality.
Michael Keenan -- Management

Why might it be used in only some cases?

I try to encourage this [participation] and use it if students are on the borderline of a grade. But some of us are introverts and forcing such people to speak in front of a large class is cruelty.
Name withheld by request

Participation is more extensively encouraged in upper division and graduate courses. Spontaneous contributions in class generally are not graded. Assigned preparations involving presentations are graded. They normally would constitute a minor portion of the total grade.
Donald Brown -- Chemistry

Why isn't it used?

I feel that it is inappropriate to grade on this unless the course objectives specifically relate to improvement in oral communication. I am opposed for three reasons:

1) It grades students on the personality variable of introversion-extroversion rather than on comprehension;
2) It penalizes students who suffer from communication apprehension -- a rather common malady;
3) It usually does not include a very satisfactory measurement of quality with the focus on quantity of communication.

Richard Dieker -- Communication

Computing Course Grades Electronically

The computational and the clerical components of grade keeping and assigning final grades are sometimes the most frustrating aspects of grading. The frustration does not come from tough professional judgments, but rather from repetition, tedium, and opportunity for error. Some of the frustration can be alleviated by using computers, either the main frame or micros.

While there are software packages specifically designed to store and compute grades, general spread sheet programs and data managers on micro computers can also be used. **GRADES** on the mainframe VAX system will assign grades. Each of these alternatives has the advantage of computations performed by machine. However, each requires that grade and student information are entered in a file. The keystroke investment in the electronic file can be quite high. If you decide to use **GRADES**, you must create an input file according to specifications available from the Academic Computing Services. Generally, the specifications require the creation of a file which lists all graded assignments, the percentage of the final grade associated with each assignment, and the students' names and assigned grades. The input file should be created at the beginning of the term and updated after each assignment.

Given that **GRADES** was created specifically for grade management, it accommodates multiple sections and allows common grading practices like dropping the lowest quiz grade. If you are using a generic spread sheet program, you will have to write the calculation formula for the overall course grade. Neither of these systems will be easy the first time you use them. Ask someone in your department who has tried an electronic system for help or call the Academic Computing Services

Grading Support Services on Campus

A reliable process for grading objective tests is offered by the Scanning Service on campus in Testing and Evaluation Services. WMU faculty may obtain lists of scores by names or social security numbers, statistical information on the class, item analysis, and tally of responses. There are some other statistical alternatives on output that you may want to explore. Number correct, T scores, or percent correct are options that you may want to use. The Service can provide information consistent with your grading system. Different forms of answer sheets can be used with this Service. For instance, some forms permit 240 multiple choice questions with 5 alternative answers, while others permit 10 alternative answers or room for a short essay question. When you submit test sheets for scoring, some procedures are recommended. For instance, ink can't be used on the answer sheets, red pencil may only be used in designated areas of the sheet, and #2 pencils are the most appropriate to fill the bubbles.

The Service can also score multiple forms of a test used in a single section. However, you must provide a separate key for each form. The Scanning Services will read your tests dropped in by 4:00 p.m. by 9:00 a.m. the next work day. The Scanning Service is located in Hillside West Apts. (side entrance). You may contact it at phone number 387-3910.

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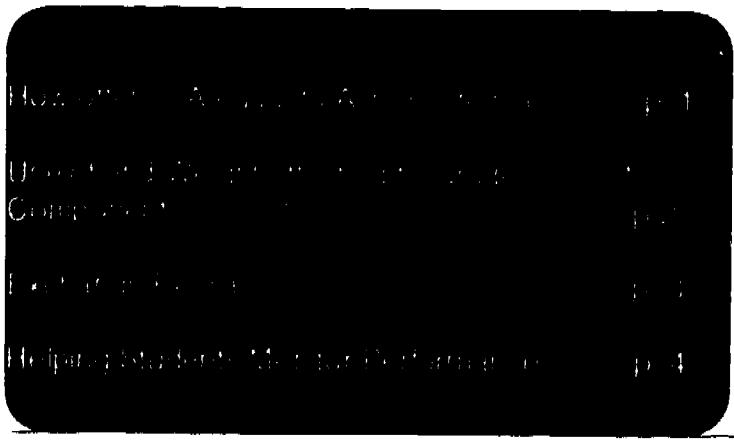
Instructional Exchange

I X

How often is A equal to A in academia?

No one believes that an "A" in one class is equivalent to an "A" in another. Faculty not only vary with respect to the type of material used for components of a final grade, e.g., papers, tests, reports, they also assess the quality of each component differently. The difference in decision making is not necessarily related to how they define quality, but to what they believe grades mean. Do grades represent a statement of what a student knows compared to what the faculty member wanted the student to learn or compared to what other students in the class learned? All grades are comparative, but there are two broad philosophical approaches to the decision process assigning grades. The approaches are grading on a curve (using other students as the standard of comparison) and grading with absolute standards (using an a priori faculty standard as the comparison). The difference not only gives rise to confrontations between students and faculty when students are dissatisfied with the results, but also causes tensions among colleagues, particularly within a department.

Grading on a curve requires the use of class achievement as the standard. In some cases, it entails the arbitrary assignment of quotas for each grade category (Frisbie, 1979). Faculty may decide to use a particular distribution to decide the number of grades in each category. That is, it can be expected (Greive, 1990) that an equal proportion of students will receive A's and F's (2.15%), B's and D's (13.59%) and the remainder C's (68.26%). Or a faculty member may look at the scores on a test and notice a natural break in the scores at two or three different points. These natural breaks then become the cutoff points for an A or C. If the standards are set uniquely in each section of a course, a score of 87 may mean a BA in one section and a CB in another.



Regardless of the extent of individual achievement differences or similarities, this method, in effect, says that the grade assigned to a student should take into consideration the context of achievement. Students are not disadvantaged by external events which may have a negative effect on their learning, e.g., textbooks which don't show up, etc. Students in some sections may have had particularly enriching discussions, while students in another may have had guest speakers that simply didn't work out. To a lesser degree, some students have to excel while some must fail. Students are not encouraged to study together or to help each other by this system of grading. The view that grades are a competition among students is encouraged.

Comparisons made with **an absolute standard grading** method involve assigning grades according to the extent that the student has met certain predetermined course standards. Students are not ranked nor do they compete directly. It's possible for an entire class to receive A's or F's (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971).

Continued on Page 4 . . . . .

Use of and Weight attached to Grade Components

No discussion of grading would be complete without a discussion of the relative weights assigned to the components of a final grade. The weight assignment represents the judgment made by a faculty member concerning the centrality of the component to the objectives of the course and the complexity or comprehensiveness of the component. Faculty members vary not only with respect to the weights assigned to components, but also to using a particular component type. A sample of 23 syllabi from the University was analyzed to show the common components of grading and the relative weights used for each of the components. This sample is very small. It probably does not represent common practice at the University, but it is real. We did not make up either the use of components as shown in Table 1 or the relative weights shown in Table 2.

Each of the syllabi was checked for the description of the components of the grade. Table 1 shows the percent of syllabi which specified each of a limited set of particular components in the discussion of grading. Notice that 45% of all of the syllabi specifically discussed quizzes, while only 36% specifically discussed a final examination.

Table 1

Percentage of Syllabi using each Grade Component

Grading Component	%
Quizzes	45
Final Exam	36
Special Assignment	31
Oral/Skills Presentation	18
Project Report	27
Technical Report	27
Mid-Term Exam	9
Attendance/Participation	9

The use of a particular component in the calculation of the final grade does not necessarily mean that the grade is heavily influenced by it. Some faculty may use 5 or 6 different components in the calculation of final grades and have one component weighted so that it accounts for 50% of the final grade. Table 2 shows the range of weights associated with each component within a single syllabus and the most typical weight associated with each of the components. The sum of the high end of the range would be substantially more than 100%, because not every syllabus contained each of the components.

Table 2

Common Components and Weight Factors

Component	Value Range	*Most Frequent Weight*
Quizzes	10% to 60%	*30%*
Final Exam	5% to 30%	*25%*
Skills Assignment	5% to 45%	*25%*
Written Report	10% to 40%	*20%*
Attend./Partic.	5% to 20%	*15%*

Quizzes, which are the most typical grade component, have the most varied weights. In many of the syllabi which were used to develop these tables the components of the final grade were equally weighted. In many cases, the weights of the various components were derived from a point system which was explained in the syllabus. For instance, 5 quizzes each of which had a total of 10 possible points, along with a final exam worth 35 possible points and a project report worth 25 points, were related to a final grading scale composed of 100 points. It was difficult for us to say whether this represented an absolute standard philosophy of grading or grading with respect to the students in the class because the criteria for assigning points were not explained. The final grade under this system did seem to be an absolute scale in that 90 points were necessary for a final grade of A.

This is the last issue of I/X for this academic year. Your ideas and comments last year were most helpful in the development of the issues in Volume 2. We appreciate candid comments about faculty likes, dislikes, and desires. Please complete the insert.

About Instructional Exchange

Instructional Exchange (I/X) is published six times per year during the fall and winter semesters. The purpose of I/X is to provide a forum for the exchange of information about instruction at Western Michigan University.

The newsletter is published jointly by the Office of University Assessment and the Intellectual Skills Program. Comments and exchanges can be directed to the I/X staff at University Assessment (Room 2010 Administration Building, ph: 7-3031) or through the VAX system addressed to BUNDA. Editorial Staff: John Jackson & Ana Gil Serafin

The Exchange Board

Functions of Unit Tests

I give unit exams and then a comprehensive final. But to some extent I am fooling myself (and probably some students) because the material does build on itself; on a unit exam I will ask questions only from that unit, but understanding that unit is to a considerable degree a function of understanding the previous units.
Werner Sichel – Economics

Our content is sequenced so that one unit or module builds on the previous one. If a student starts out by skimming the material, neglecting to do the written practice assignments, and missing class during the first two weeks, the likelihood of failure is extremely high.
Carol Payne Smith – Education and Professional Development

Lower division courses require more frequent quizzes (weekly) to help keep the student on task, alert the student and instructor to deficiencies or potential problems, and to relieve some of the pressure from more encompassing exams. .
Donald Brown – Chemistry

Use of Textbook Material

Because my lectures are meant to amplify and apply the information contained in the text my tests include material from both, but in all honesty weight more toward the text because it reduces the "hassles" about the "correct" answer.
Name withheld by request

At the Upper division or graduate level, sometimes excellent texts are available and lectures can parallel the text while offering enrichment, enhancement, and relevant applications and illustrations. Often, however, single texts do not meet course needs and assignments must be made from multiple sources including "the literature." The lecturer is much more likely to present material not in the "textbook" or to synthesize or contrast materials from multiple sources.
Donald Brown – Chemistry

My direction to students is that they are responsible for both the lecture material and the textbook. There is, however, substantial overlap. I try to cover the most important material in class (often explaining difficult to understand material in the text). The outcome is that the great majority of the material on exams has been dealt with in lectures. It is very important that students carefully read and study (work with) assignments before I lecture on the material. This is not a criterion for grading, but those who keep up with assignments get more out of lectures and do better on exams.
Werner Sichel – Economics

Getting at Comprehension

Because of class size I have to use multiple choice and true/false unit tests. I don't think they are particularly effective measures of comprehension, so I give a 12-page term paper, too.
Trudy Verser – Management

Heavy emphasis is placed upon the comprehensive final in which, in the longer period of time allowed, the students have the responsibility and opportunity to respond to questions that permit them to synthesize data, concepts and elements of the course into statements of the most comprehensive understanding they have obtained through the course. The final comprehensive examinations must, of course, be constructed of the proper stimulus to permit this.
Stanley Robin – Sociology

Examinations in my class are all multiple-choice, but the final is pitched much more at the analysis and comprehension objectives than the knowledge objectives. However, I also require a term project paper that accomplishes the same task. I worry about international students being disadvantaged by the multiple-choice format and the local students guessing more than they should. The international students are disadvantaged not only because the format of the examination is different from the essay format with which they are culturally familiar, but the test is a much more timed activity for them.
Mary Anne Bunda – Educational Leadership

Helping Students Monitor Performance

Students need assistance in monitoring their own performance in a class. While most syllabi provide sufficient information for a student to calculate progress, often students don't do it. This is particularly true of freshmen and new transfers who are the most "at risk" students. Faculty can provide a service to students by systematically helping students monitor academic progress. There are a number of ways to perform this task.

Each time a graded assignment is returned to the class, a discussion can be held of the influence of the component on the final grade. For instance, "This is quiz 3. If you have only 15 points accumulated on quizzes, and you want a B in this course you will have to perform very well on the last two quizzes."

Immediately before the final day to drop a class, the class can as a whole calculate their current grade and estimate the final grade. This procedure not only will allow some students to drop, but also will identify those students who may need tutoring assistance. For instance, "The grade in this class is composed of three short papers, a midterm, a project, and a final. Calculate your course grade with the components you currently have and what you expect on the project and the final. Now lower the estimates on the project and recalculate the grade. Those people who have an estimate of a DC or lower, see me after class."

Help in Writing

The Academic Skills Center offers tutoring in writing for undergraduate students only. The Writing Lab is located in 1039 Moore Hall. Students may be referred for writing help in two different ways: a professor referral or self referral. The referral may result in a regular one- to two-hour-a-week tutoring session or a drop-in session. However, students should be aware that appointments must be made a week in advance for drop-in sessions. Tutoring is available from January 14 to April 12. Tutors can work with students on redrafting papers for any class.

The lab hours are 8:00 am to 8:00 pm Monday through Thursday and 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on Friday.

If you have any questions, call 387-4442.

A is A or not. . . . . Continued from page 1

This method often requires the instructor to establish specific point values for several aspects of any student product. The instructor must establish point ranges to represent each grade For instance, a term paper has a possibility of 15 points with 3 points for structure, 6 points for evidence of quality, etc., and an A is 12 or more points. The system can also be simplified to 90% of the points is equivalent to an A. 85% to 89% to a BA, 80% to 84% to a B, etc.

There are several advantages to this grading method. First, students can independently decide the type of grades they wish to receive by the amount of effort they are willing to invest. Second, a student is not linked to how well or poorly others are doing. And lastly, study groups can be organized and maintained without fear of jeopardizing anyone's grades. On the other hand, while there is a direct relationship between quality of performance as defined by an individual instructor and grade assignment (Frisbie, 1979), faculty may vary in their definition of "quality" leading to tension among members of the department. Unlike a difference in philosophy of grading, this difference in judgment is likely to lead to accusations of lax standards. Deciding the standards to set for each grade, reasonable student expectations and prerequisite knowledge are critical challenges (Frisbie, 1979).

Either philosophy of grading can be used for each of the components of a final course grade. However, it is hoped that the selection of a philosophy would be consistent within a course. The assignment of the final grade is further complicated by deciding upon the appropriate weight per component of the final grade.

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