

ALTERNATIVE GRADING PRACTICES

Standard-Based & Specification
Grading



MEET THE TEAM



Heather Rippetoe

College of Education
& Human Sciences

Whitson-Hester
School of Nursing

College of Fine Arts



Mallory Matthews

College of Business

Interdisciplinary
Studies

Agriculture & Human
Ecology



Lacy Means

College of
Arts & Sciences



Carrie Roberson

College of
Engineering

SESSION RESOURCES

- Session will be recorded.
- Slide deck will be shared.
- We will be in the chat to answer any questions.
- Book a consultation with your instructional designer!



AGENDA



- Intro to Alternative Grading
- Standard-Based Grading Overview
- Specification Grading Overview
- Benefits and Hurdles
- How to Get Started
- Available Resources

SESSION GOALS



**CONVERSATION
STARTER**



EASY WIN



STRATEGIC GOAL

Alternative Grading



Standard-Based Grading

- Assigns separate marks for each specific standard within an assignment, with final grades based on the number or type of standards successfully completed, effective for assessing multiple discrete skills.

Specification-Grading

- Involves grading assignments based on whether they meet a set of clear, high-level specifications, with final grades determined by meeting specs on related bundles of assignments

Competency-Based Grading

- Assesses students' mastery of specific skills or competencies, emphasizing learning and growth through multiple assessments and opportunities for reassessment.

Mastery-Based Grading

- Assesses students on their ability to demonstrate understanding and proficiency in specific learning objectives, focusing on their progress and mastery rather than traditional letter grades.

Contract-Grading

- Involves students signing agreements with instructors that outline the specific tasks and performance levels required to achieve grades, often negotiated individually and tailored to each student, like specifications grading.

Labor-Based Grading

- A type of contract grading that focuses solely on the amount of work a student completes, without judging the quality, often used in writing classes to shift the power dynamic and encourage the development of successful writing habits.

Ungrading

- Umbrella term for alternative grading practices that focus on feedback rather than grades, often involving regular student meetings to discuss progress, and represents a broader philosophy of challenging traditional grading systems and addressing their issues.

**WHAT DO THEY
HAVE IN
COMMON?**



1

SOLID FOUNDATION

Growth Mindset

Personalized Learning

Intrinsic Motivation

Goal Setting

Metacognition

2



IN FEEDBACK LOOPS WE TRUST

**CLEARLY
DEFINED
STANDARDS**

**HELPFUL
FEEDBACK**

**MARKS
INDICATE
PROGRESS**

**REATTEMPTS
WITHOUT
PENALTY**

3

HIGH EXPECTATIONS



Which of the following common features of alternative grading practices resonates most with you?



Clear Learning Objectives

Clearly defining what students will learn or be able to do at the end of the course helps them know what to expect.



Helpful Feedback

Providing feedback that helps students improve on the next assignment or revise the current one, rather than justifying points deducted.



Marks Indicate Progress

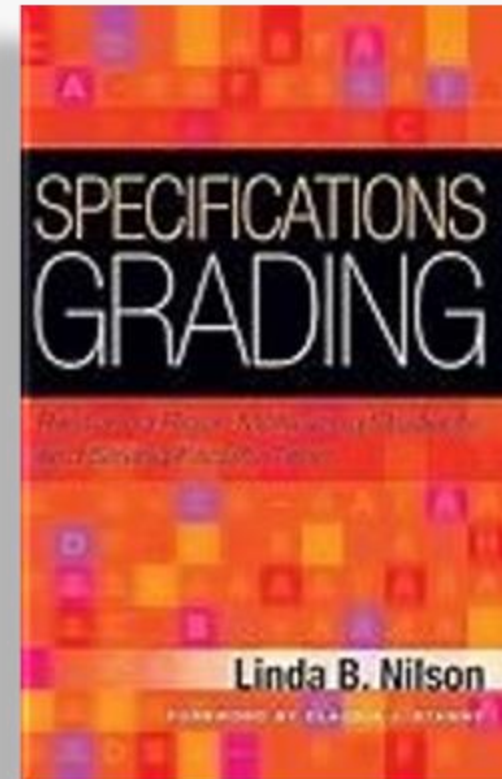
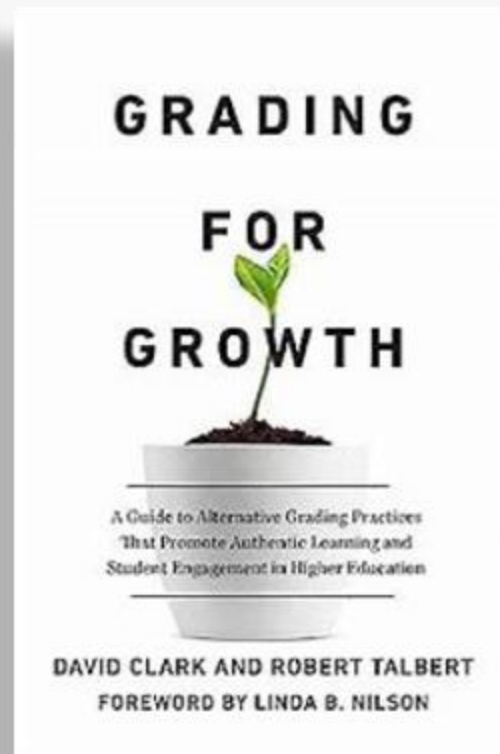
Using marks such as "Not Yet," "Needs Revision," or "Satisfactory" to let students know when they have met the standard, rather than just giving a numerical score.




Reattempts Without Penalty

Allowing students to revise or reattempt standards or assignments without a penalty, focusing on grading mastery versus grading compliance.

RESOURCES





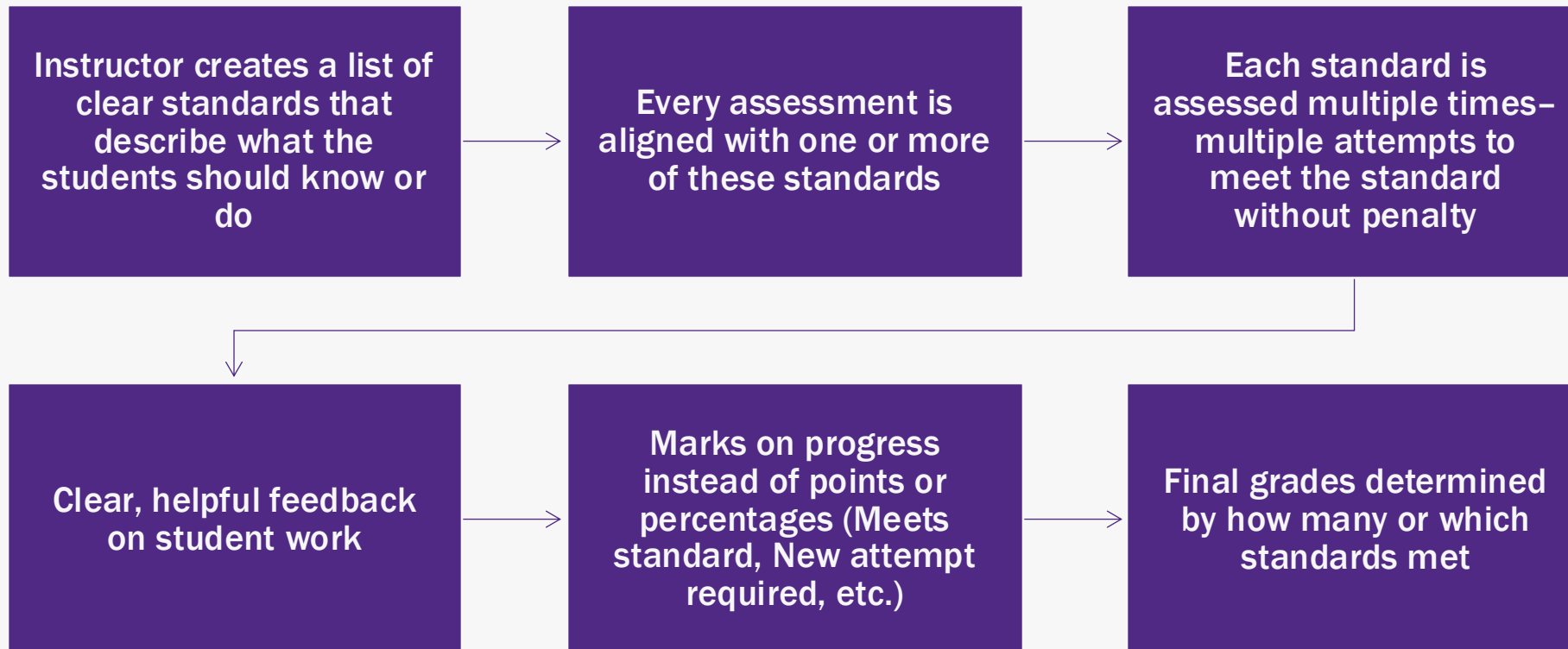
**“THERE’S NOT JUST ONE
RIGHT WAY TO IMPLEMENT
ALTERNATIVE GRADING”**

- Grading for Growth, Clark & Talbert

STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

Standards, Skills, Feedback

OVERVIEW

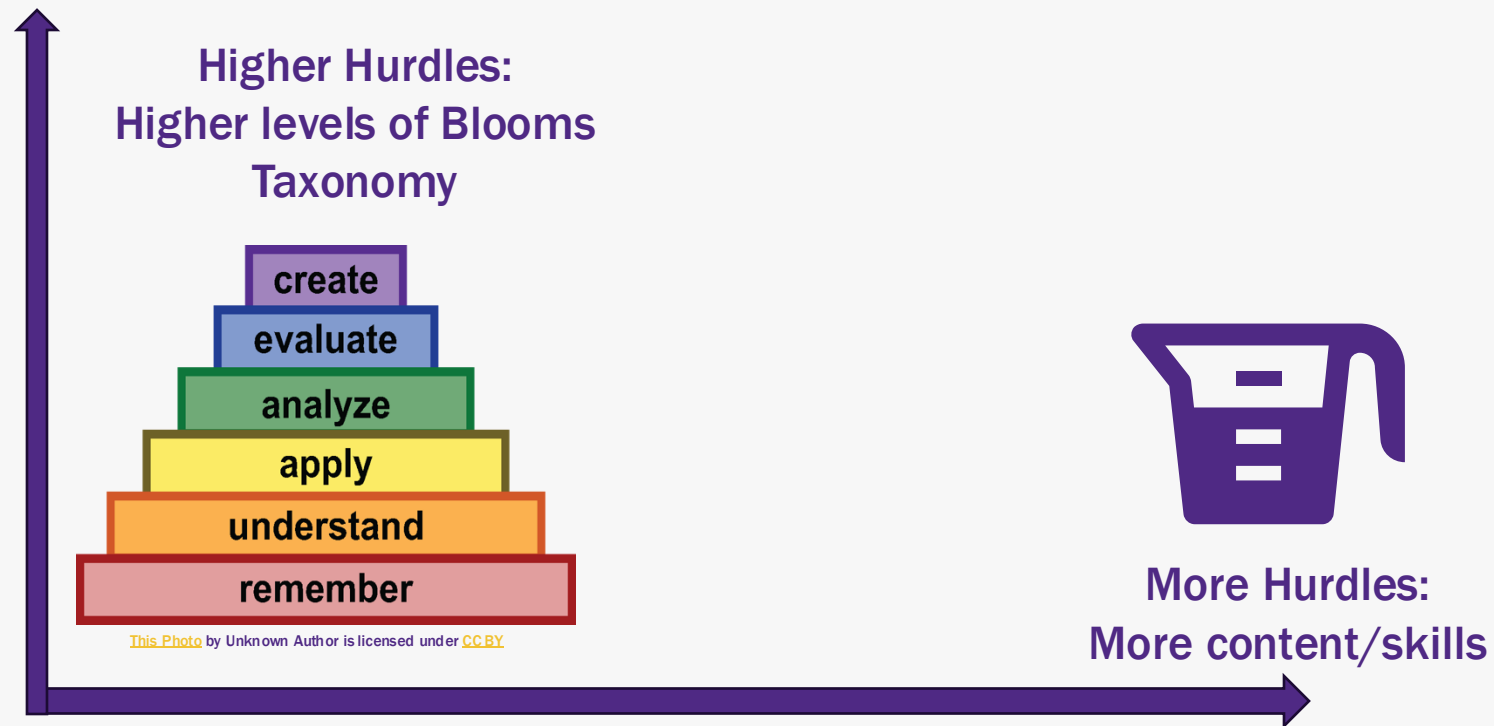


"In operational terms, students receive grades based on the number of work requirements and/or the specific work requirements they complete at a satisfactory level by given due dates.

In other words, students earn higher grades by jumping more hurdles that show evidence of more learning (i.e., mastery of a greater amount or breadth of knowledge or a greater number of skills on the same level) and/or jumping higher hurdles that show evidence of more advanced learning, or both."

Linda Nilson
Specifications Grading

HIGHER VS MORE HURDLES



STANDARD BASED EXAMPLE

A	B	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pass gateway exam• Submit 20 homework reports• Complete all 14 core standards• Complete all 20 auxiliary standards• Complete 9 core standards on Final Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pass gateway exam• Submit 15 homework reports• Complete 12 of 14 core standards• Complete 17 of 20 auxiliary standards• Complete 7 of 9 core standards on Final Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit 10 homework reports• Complete 10 of 14 core standards• Complete 15 of 20 auxiliary standards• Complete 5 of 9 core standards on Final Exam

A blue ballpoint pen with a silver tip is positioned diagonally over a document. The document features a bar chart with several blue bars of varying heights. The background is a light blue gradient.

EXAMPLE OF MARKS THAT INDICATE PROGRESS

- **Successful**
- **Minor Revision Needed**
- **New Attempt Required**
- **Incomplete/Insufficient**

SPECIFICATION GRADING

Specifications, Bundles, & Tokens

OVERVIEW

Assignment Specifications: Instructors provide a detailed list of criteria for each assignment, outlining what constitutes a successful submission.

Grading System: Assignments are graded based on these criteria, with possible outcomes like "Satisfactory" or "Not Yet".

Revisions and Reattempts: Students can revise or reattempt their work to meet the specified criteria.

Final Grades: Final grades are determined by completing "bundles" of assignments, which group related tasks together. The final grade depends on the number or difficulty of these bundles.

Flexibility with Tokens: Students may have the option to use tokens for additional flexibility, such as extending deadlines or revising submissions beyond the usual limits.

Pass/Fail Grading of Assignments: Students must meet the requirements to earn the credit for each assignment. "Why accept unacceptable work?" Linda Nilson, *Specification Grading*

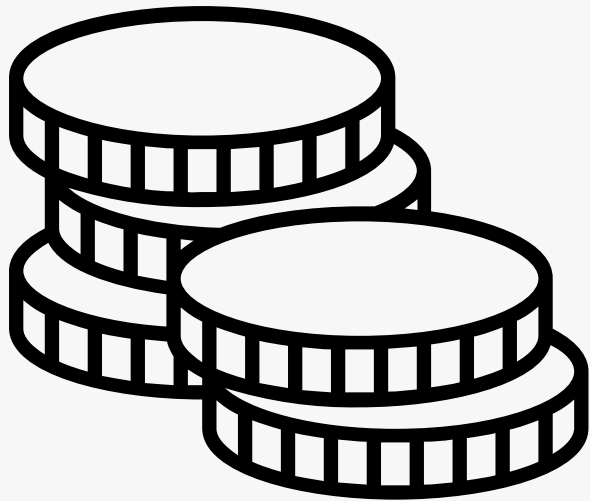


MODULES AND BUNDLES

Bundles – A group of thematically related assignments or a list of all requirements for a single grade level.

Modules – A unit of course organization, thematically related class activities, lectures, materials, assignments, etc. Like a bundle, but must be completed in order.

TOKENS



Flexible Allocation: Allocate 1-5 tokens at the beginning of the course.

Instructor-Defined Rules: You determine the rules and conditions for token use.

Guideline-Based Exchange: Students may exchange tokens according to the set guidelines, using one or more tokens as needed.

Versatile Applications: Tokens can be redeemed for revising or retaking exams, extending assignment deadlines, making up missed work, or excusing absences.

Earning Additional Tokens: Students can earn extra tokens by completing additional work or submitting assignments early.

EXAMPLES

“Bundle” Grading Structure for 10 Module Course

D Complete the first 3 modules

C Complete the first 5 modules

B Complete the first 8 modules

A Complete all 10 modules

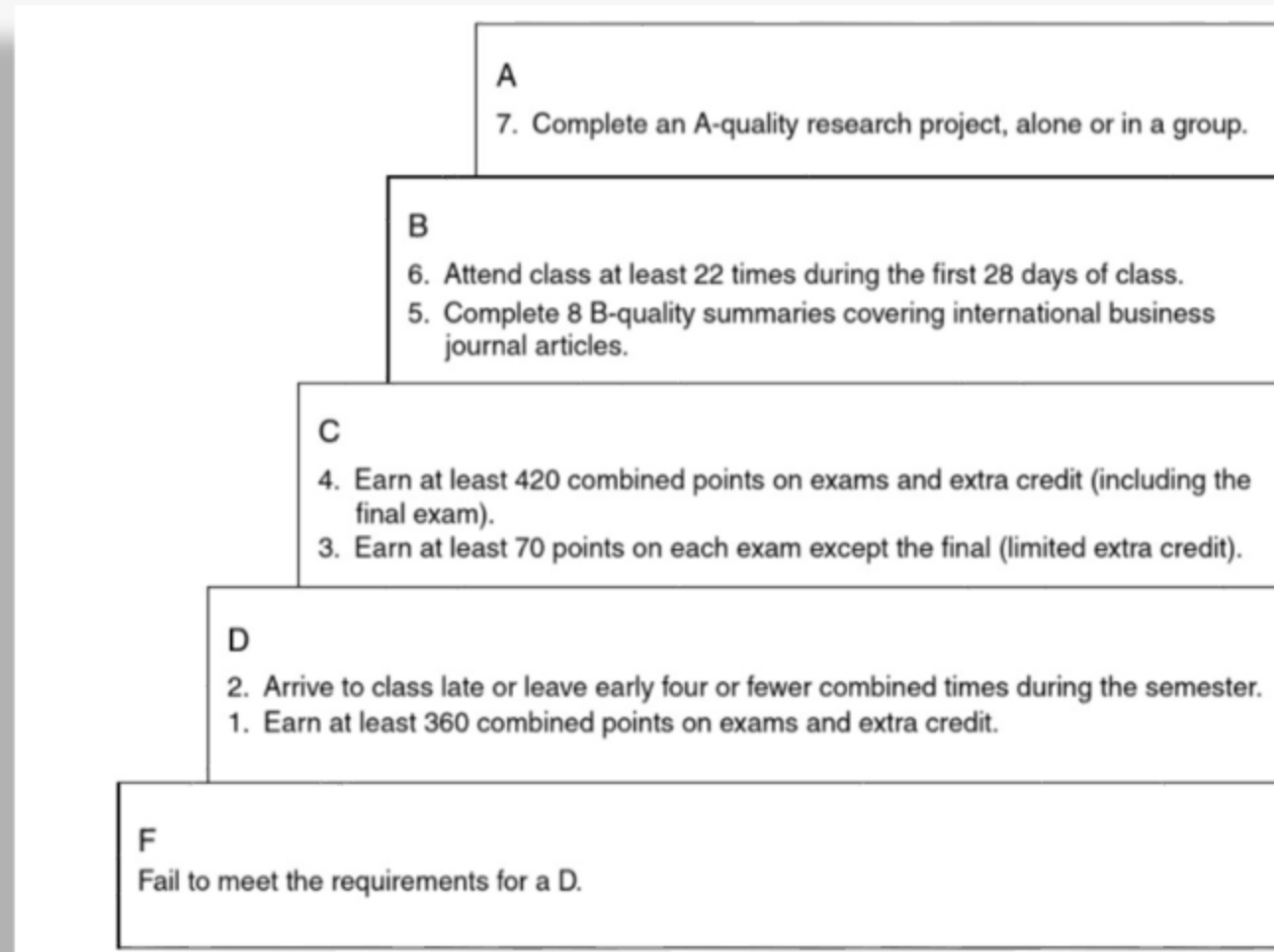
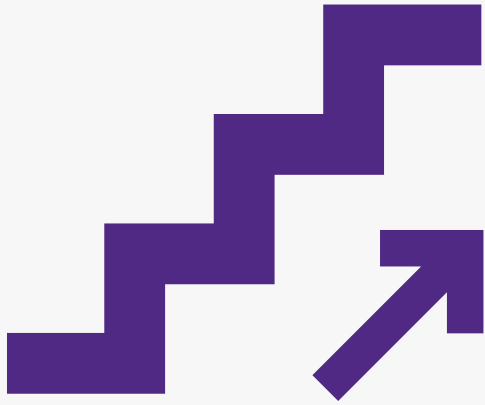
Spec Grading Structure Example

D Pass both midterm and final with a 60% or higher

C All that is required for a D, plus module reading assignment papers that meet the stated requirements for each assignment. Only two late or unacceptable submissions are allowed (will drop to a D).

B All that is required for a C, plus four reflection papers detailing your progress in mastering material.

A All that is required of B, plus collaborative group work on an authentic assessment (project or problem-based learning).

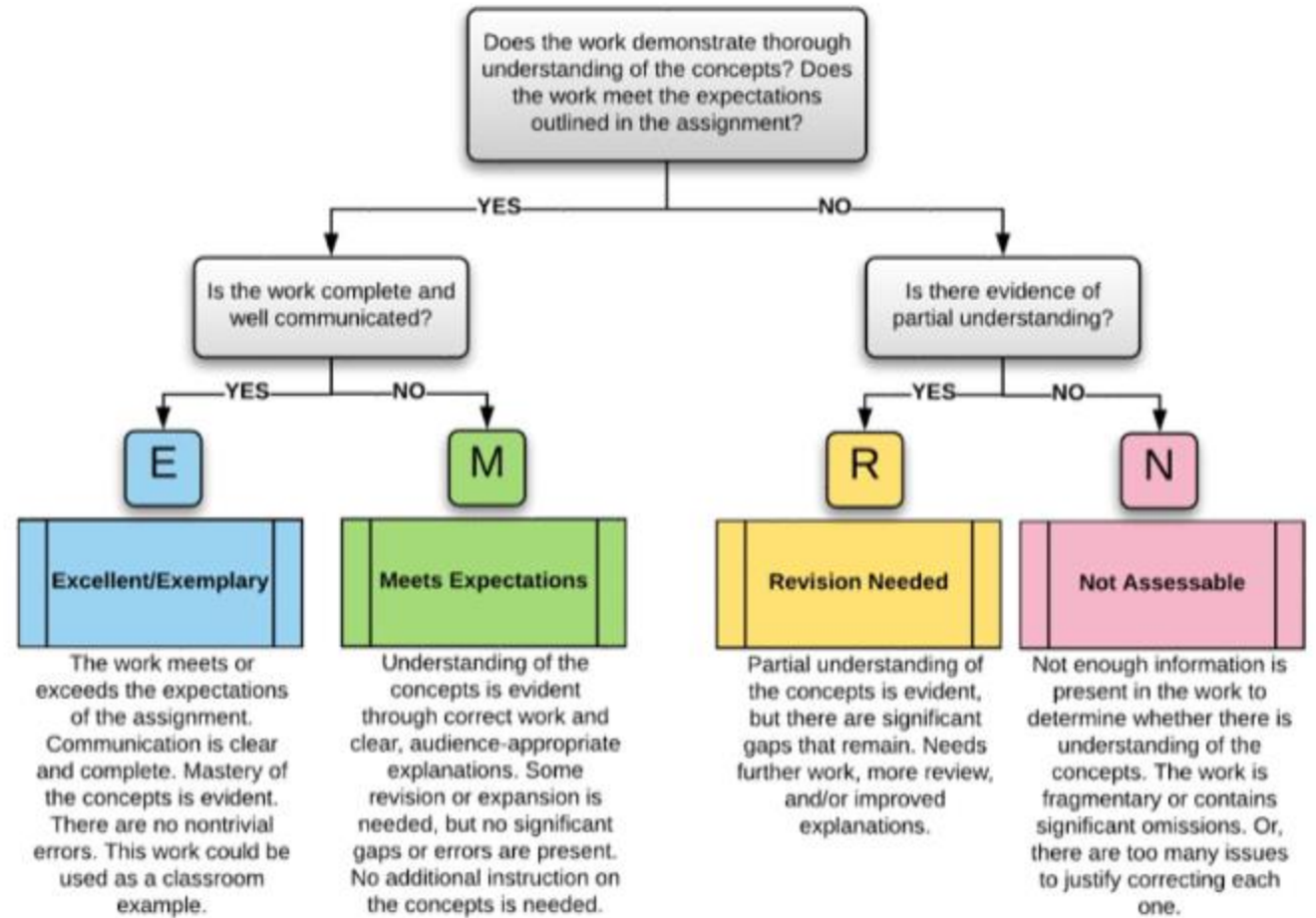


Specification Grading, Linda Nilson

BLENDED EXAMPLE

- To receive a C in the course, the student must have a total average score of 70% or higher on all the exams.
- To receive a B in the course, the student must meet the requirements for a C, plus complete Module B.
- To receive an A in the course, the student must meet the requirements for a B, plus complete Module A.

RUBRIC EXAMPLE



EMRN rubric based on the EMRF rubric, due to Rodney Stutzman and Kimberly Race: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ717675>
EMRN rubric by Robert Talbert is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0



BENEFITS



Clear learning targets



Transparent grading practices



Improved student engagement



Detailed, helpful feedback



Promotion of process of learning



Opportunities for student choice



Flexibility

POTENTIAL HURDLES



Work

Time

Education

**Initial
resistance**

GETTING STARTED

Start with Course Design Best Practices

- What learning objectives will I measure?
- How will I define and measure mastery?
- How will I translate student progress into a grade?
- How will I add flexibility?
- What is my buy-in plan?

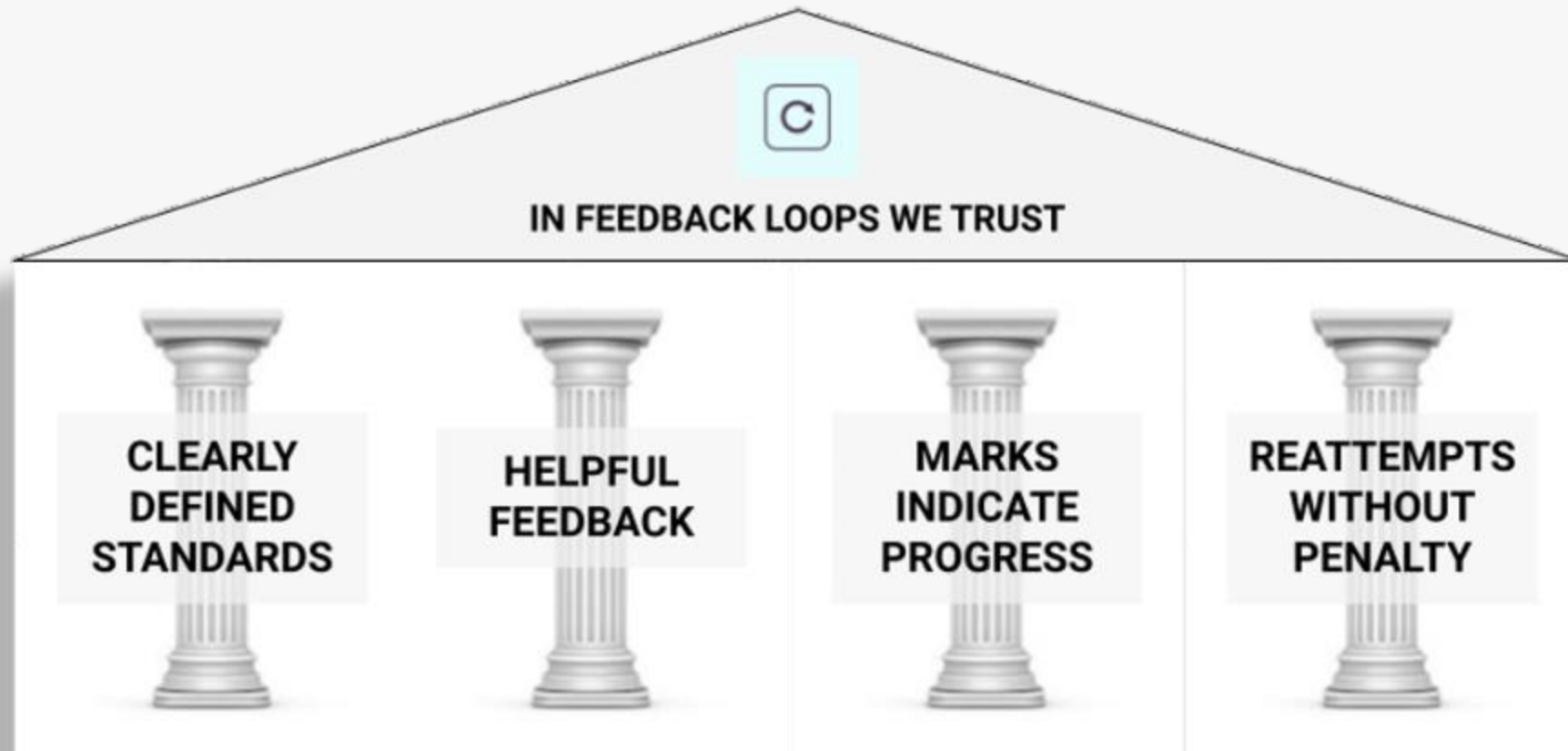


GENERATING STUDENT BUY-IN

- Introduce rationale
- Be clear
- Allow for practice assignment
- Allow for student questions or concerns
- Explain Tokens as a safety net
- Focus on the learning



WHAT CAN YOU DO **NOW?**



WHAT CAN YOU DO **NOW?**

BOOK A
CONSULTATION

SCHEDULE A CLASS
OBSERVATION

SCHEDULE AN
INSTRUCTIONAL
DIAGNOSTIC

GOOD NEWS



HOW AI CAN HELP WITH ALTERNATIVE GRADING PRACTICES

1. Brainstorming: [See this example](#)
2. “Thinking like a teacher”
3. Assignment review
4. Drafting specifications and standards
5. Course descriptions
6. Checking for clarity and student confusion
7. More



Thank you!

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, CONCERNS?

[Feedback Survey](#)

Register for our session on
January 28th: **Poll Everywhere**

Register [HERE](#)



Resources:

- Talbert, R., & Clark, D. (2023). *Grading for growth: A Guide to Alternative Grading Practices That Promote Learning And Equity In Higher Education*. Stylus Publishing.
- Nilson, L. B. (2015). *Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, And Saving Faculty Time*. Stylus Publishing.
- [Grading Alternatives Resource Page](#)
- [Reasonable reassessments - by David Clark](#)
- [Not all limits are the same - by David Clark](#)
- [The Happiness Lab Podcast: Making the Grade](#)
- ["How AI is changing my grading approach – for now."](#)