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Elements of Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice, Second Edition

By Douglas Reeves

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Elements of Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice, Second Edition* by Douglas Reeves. *Elements of Grading* looks at the issues and controversies surrounding grading practices, examines four criteria the author believes are essential for effective grading—fairness, accuracy, specificity, and timeliness—and promotes a fresh conversation about grading practices to influence opinions and promote change.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

Chapter 1

Effective Grading in a Standards-Based World

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1. When is the method of evaluating students' performance by comparing it to other students' performance appropriate to use? When does it not make sense to utilize this method?

2. What is the fundamental characteristic of standards-based grading?

3. What reasons do Diane Ravitch and Yong Zhao each give for being critical of standards and standards-based grading?

4. Briefly describe each of the three hallmarks of standards' impact on grading practices.

Chapter 2

What the Common Core Means for Grading

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1. What do the Common Core State Standards say and not say—in other words, what remains each curriculum's and each state's prerogative?

2. How does the Common Core shift the focus of classroom writing, and what must teachers do to meet these expectations?

3. What will be the great question as the Common Core proceeds and students' results on assessments are lower than anticipated?

4. Why does the choice of grading practices remain a key decision for educators to make themselves even with the influences of the Common Core permeating their practices?

Chapter 3

The Impact of Feedback on Achievement

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1. Through his research, John Hattie found a number of teaching and leadership practices that, with regard to their impact on student achievement, are more powerful than personality, home, and demographic factors. Name four such factors.

2. What surprising conclusion did Linda Darling-Hammond draw from her study of educational systems we commonly think of as strongly test based?

3. What is the difference between factual accuracy and contextual accuracy?

4. How can attempting to correct unfairness in standardized tests cause more problems? Why is it important to keep accuracy and specificity at the forefront in the pursuit of fairness?

Chapter 4

The Grading Debate

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1. What can you say about what will *not* change during the grading reform process, which can reassure stakeholders?

2. What factors other than performance are frequently involved in determining student grades?

3. What arguments are commonly given in support of awarding a grade of 0 on a one hundred–point scale for missing work? How would you respond to those arguments?

4. Explain, using a mathematical model, why it is unfair to grade missing or incomplete work with a 0 using the one hundred–point scale.

Chapter 5

How to Improve Fairness

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1. Given that students' backgrounds, preparation, tools, responsibilities, and degree of support vary widely, how can a grade *ever* be fair? How does the inclusion of context improve fairness in grading?

2. What are some of the consequences of a perceived lack of fairness in grading policies?

3. Girls tend to get better grades in high school but perform more poorly than boys on external tests, while boys get poorer grades than girls but perform better on external tests. What might account for this phenomenon?

4. How was Orlando Griego's La Familia project able to improve the performance of Latino students?

Chapter 6

How to Improve Accuracy

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1. Using the example of the arithmetic mean, explain the author's point that numerical precision can create the illusion of accuracy.

2. This chapter lists four features that a middle school science teacher could adopt to improve grading accuracy. What are those strategies? Would they work in your classroom?

3. What are the advantages of collaborative scoring? Describe the protocol discussed in this chapter for collaborative scoring.

4. What is the "minimum 50" option? In the face of strong resistance to eliminating the 0, what other means of avoiding mathematical distortion does the author suggest?

Chapter 7

How to Improve Specificity

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1. Describe a formula for arriving at grades that has greater specificity yet also encourages and rewards work ethic, respect, and determination in students.

2. What is the "coward's F"?

3. What method does the author suggest for obtaining student feedback regarding grading policy changes in a way that ensures anonymity and confidentiality?

4. What did Herbert Marsh's survey discover with regard to teachers' fears that they will lose popularity if they make too many demands on their students?

Chapter 8

How to Improve Timeliness

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1. What is the point of Atul Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto*, and how does it relate to the issue of timely feedback? Name several items you would place on a checklist if you were developing one for use with your students.

2. Describe how the three-column rubric works. How does it save time in articulating and delivering feedback?

3. What features in assessment design support the effort to ensure that the results are delivered in a timely way?

4. What should administrators look for when monitoring teacher responses to student achievement data? What can they do or say to reassure teachers who find this process threatening?

Chapter 9

Time-Saving Strategies for Busy Teachers

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1. What are some of the consequences for teachers' time management of giving students who fail assignments a 0?

2. Name some alternatives to the "quick 0."

3. What is the menu system, and how does it work to support students who have done poorly or failed to complete an assignment in the classroom?

4. How does the menu system also support the goals of teachers? What are common misgivings teachers have about the menu system, and how can they be overcome?

Chapter 10

Student Voices in Grading Practices

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1. What two risks surface when schools attempt to include student voices in discussions about grading practices? What two questions must teachers and school leaders ask as they consider including students in these discussions?

2. What is the best way to test hypotheses about engaging students in grading practices?

3. Describe a situation in which you viewed students exhibiting evidence of proficiency or mastery.

4. Briefly detail the two levels of response to take when disagreements about grading arise among students, parents, and teachers.

Chapter 11

Leading Change for Effective Grading Policies

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1. According to the author, the evidence of the need for improved grading systems has been around for nearly a century. What have been the obstacles to achieving reform?

2. When beginning a discussion about grading policy, why is it best to begin with an explicit vision?

3. In most complex educational matters, a range to successful implementation exists. What is the range with regard to grading policies?

4. What are the differences between explicit and implicit evaluation systems for teachers and administrators? How do these differences make the case for systemic alignment of change initiatives?

Chapter 12

Grading for Students With Special Needs

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1. Why are fairness and accuracy tightly linked when it comes to students with special needs?

2. What is an individualized education plan (IEP), and what is the most accurate approach to grading students who have IEPs?

3. In your own words, define *incrementalization*. What four steps might teachers use to bring consistency and discipline to the incrementalization process?

4. What considerations do all students deserve in regular and special education? How should all students, including students with special needs, view grades?

Chapter 13

The Impact of Technology on Grading Practices

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1. What beneficial improvements do electronic gradebooks make on handwritten gradebooks? What worst practices do teachers risk engaging in when they adopt electronic gradebooks?

2. How has equipping students with digital electronic resources, making their backpacks lighter, impacted communication among teachers, parents, and students?

3. What two procedures can be used to determine the reliability of how students' work is graded by different teachers?

4. What are some qualities exhibited by change leaders whose schools have successfully implemented effective change?