**Myths about Grading Blog Post**

**29 January 2008**

<http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html>

Standards-Based Grading: Mythbusters Edition

It's the end of the first semester---a good time to reflect on how I'm progressing with my professional goals this year. This edition of the blog is devoted to how implementation of best practices in grading have fared. Just for kicks and giggles, let's look at things a la Mythbusters. I'll bullet my fears about what I thought might happen (or what other teachers were sure would happen), and then let you know if things turned out to be *busted, plausible*, or *confirmed*.

* If I don't grade homework, students won't do it.

This myth is **plausible**. I had some students who couldn't be bothered to regularly complete their homework (in spite of phone calls home), but then, it doesn't appear that a grade would have motivated them, either. The difference in the outcome was that before, kids would be in danger of failing because they accumulated a lot of zeros. Now, they just have to work harder on summative assessments to prove that they know the information without the practice. (Go read[Dr. Pezz's take on this myth](http://drpezz.wordpress.com/2008/01/26/do-we-create-student-failures/) for more info.)

* If I don't penalize late work by taking points off or putting zeros in the gradebook, I'll end up with a ton of last minute assignments to mark at the end of the quarter.

This myth is **busted**. Kids who don't take care of business during the quarter are rarely the ones who will magically find motivation at the end of the grading period. I've actually had fewer late assignments to look at this year than in previous years.

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| http://whatitslikeontheinside.com/uploaded_images/bustedplacard-727922.jpg |
| Image Credit: Unknown |

* If I let students retake tests, I'll spend all my time giving and grading tests.

This myth is also **busted**. If you believe that just because you create an opportunity that every single kid will take advantage of it---you're sadly mistaken. Just like not all students who need tutoring will come for help, not all students who could improve by additional study and either reattempting a test or engaging in an alternative assessment will do so. Out of 150 students this semester, I had about 10 who chose to go this route. If you're wondering "Why bother?" at this point, then my answer is simply that I now have 10 more kids who are able to meet the standards than I would have. I think that's worth it.

* This type of grading is too different for kids to understand.

This myth is **plausible**. Kids do understand the difference between [equal and fair](http://whatitslikeontheinside.com/2007/08/equal-and-fair-2007.html). They know the difference between *formative* and *summative*. They get that the power of their grade is more in their hands than mine. But the actual connection between the evidence and the target is something I need to work on helping them define in the future. "Why isn't a '2' good enough? It's good enough for me." Well, kid, not for me. I will say that my sophomores showed a stronger adoption and understanding of standards-based grading than my juniors and seniors. Now that I've seen [how the culture of the school operates on kids](http://whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/rigorous-bell-curve.html), I can see why this might have happened. My sophs, new to the school, had not been exposed to the kind of beatdown my older students have with the environment there. The juniors and seniors have been taught the value of "point whoring," not learning. A classroom like mine where they have to show learning doesn't fit with what was driven home to them as sophomores. That makes me sad.

* This type of grading is more time-consuming and difficult than "traditional" practices.

This one is SO **busted**. Elementary teachers in this district are receiving hundreds of dollars *each* for a stipend to implement these practices in their classrooms. (The Union insisted that teachers get some extra pay for doing the right thing for kids. Just shake your head at this idea and move on.) What takes more time? Going through each and every item, then totaling points and calculating a percentage...or...going through an assignment and asking yourself "Does the kid get it or not?" I have to tell you that option two is both less time-consuming and far more meaningful. When I finish a set of papers, I have far more information about strengths and weaknesses in the classroom---and ideas about adjusting my instruction.

So, there you have it. Jump on into this pool of best practices in grading. I'm telling you, the water is not shark-infested and you won't end up with swimmer's itch, but you will find your classroom a soothing environment.

**Update:** If you've reached this post from a search engine, you can access all standards-based grading information for this blog (and there's quite a bit) by clicking on the [grading label](http://whatitslikeontheinside.com/labels/grading.html). It's greatly appreciated if you would leave a comment as you look around!

Also, I am available for presentations and workshops if you need more resources and information on best practices in grading. Contact me for more information.

Posted by [The Science Goddess](https://www.blogger.com/profile/02846516022505481326)at [5:17 AM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html) 

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Labels: [grading](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/search/label/grading)

Some comments:

**[Exhausted Intern](https://www.blogger.com/profile/04065801098890772587) said...**

You've summed it up from the secondary perspective. I agree wholeheartedly with your Mythbusters assessments.

I would add that calculating grades at the end of the quarter is a challenge - but only because you have to convert several standards-based scores into a single letter grade. A standards-based report card at the secondary would alleviate this chore as well as provide a better communication tool for students, parents, and educators (inlcuding universities, if they'd only get on board).

Nice summary!

[6:37 AM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html?showComment=1201617420000#c7691563839422373434)

**[The Science Goddess](https://www.blogger.com/profile/02846516022505481326) said...**

I think that if colleges would realize that when high school change what the grade symbolizes, they (colleges) would have a far better understanding of the students who are applying. As it is now, they complain about all the remediation needed and how unprepared students are. Perhaps colleges are asking the wrong questions.

[6:41 AM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html?showComment=1201617660000#c7216387608337161199)

**[Exhausted Intern](https://www.blogger.com/profile/04065801098890772587) said...**

Pretty! I like.

[**Hugh O'Donnell**](https://www.blogger.com/profile/07294517971286376134)**said...**

A+ for observations. A+ for creatively expressing those observations.

With myth #1, my experience has been that homework is no substitute for classwork supervised by the teacher!

Skills practice can be useful, especially if, as Dr. Pezz has noted, there's not threat of having homework treated like a quiz or test. (Like taking your vitamins...it's just good for you!)

[9:26 PM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html?showComment=1202189160000#c1448232680342075191)

**[Jody](https://www.blogger.com/profile/16002272147867610221) said...**

Thanks for your energetic, info-packed posts! I admire your reflectiveness.

I'm a 7-year veteran just beginning to consider non-traditional approaches to grading in a very traditional district (Sherwood, OR). Any thoughts on where to begin?

Thanks!

[10:15 PM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html?showComment=1218086100000#c387821796438134546)

**[The Science Goddess](https://www.blogger.com/profile/02846516022505481326) said...**

Hi, Jody, I'm glad you're enjoying the journey I've been taking.

If you haven't read [How to Grade for Learning](http://www.amazon.com/How-Grade-Learning-Linking-Standards/dp/1575178168/ref%3Dpd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1215358069&sr=1-1), it is a good place to begin. The title is a bit of a misnomer. O'Connor is really more about "why" than "how." Susan Brookhart's [Grading](http://www.amazon.com/Grading-2nd-Susan-M-Brookhart/dp/013221721X/ref%3Dsr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1215357772&sr=8-2) is underrated---but an excellent resource.

I'd recommend you get an admin to go with you (or at minimum, send you) to the [Sound Grading Practices Conference](http://www.assessmentinst.com/event_gradingconf.php) in Portland in December.

It appears that you've already perused most of my archives, so you have access to my policy, gradebook setup, etc.

Let me know if I can be of further assistance. Welcome to grading!

[11:03 PM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html?showComment=1218088980000#c7926621131134536009)

**[runningcaj](https://www.blogger.com/profile/06743634165311457113) said...**

Oh how I wish I could hook our entire district up to your blog. You say things very well and honestly. I can't wait to read more posts!

[12:25 PM](http://blog.whatitslikeontheinside.com/2008/01/standards-based-grading-mythbusters.html?showComment=1240601100000#c3479721930009571362)