

# **Assigning Grades, Giving Students Feedback and Grades Policies in Social Science Foundations Courses: A Handout For Tutorial Leaders<sup>1</sup>**

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This handout on *Assigning Grades, Giving Students Feedback and Grades Policies* is designed for Foundations tutorial leaders and takes account of the 270 hour limit on Unit One TAs. It draws a distinction between assigning grades and providing feedback to students. It also offers various directions and policies around grading. Although this handout is relatively generic in its focus, please consult your course director for policies relevant to the course in which you are teaching. Ask for specific guidelines about grading particular assignments.

For the first assignment, it is very useful for the course team to have a grading meeting where examples of A/B/C/D assignments are shared to help establish a consistent grading scale and identify what qualifies as an A assignment. This is of particular value to new tutorial leaders.

This *Handout* was originally developed for use in my Foundations course (Women and Society, Social Science 1185) where it has been of great assistance in setting guidelines for TAs, and ensuring consistency of practices across many tutorials. For your information, this *Handout* is posted on the Foundations website in a printable format and can be downloaded and revised (<http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations>).

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<sup>1</sup> See also [So You're A TA: A Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2005) prepared by the Centre for Support of Teaching.

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## PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS COURSES AND HOURS OF WORK

### 1. THE FOUNDATIONS PROGRAM

The Foundations program offers nine credit courses (1.5 course credits) which have two hours of lecture and two hours of tutorial. The additional tutorial hour has been put in place to support university-level skill development among students. Each course highlights certain skills as indicated in the course outline. It is critical that this additional hour be used for skill development. Although compelling course material could likely fill tutorial discussions for the full two hours, this is not the intention of the Foundations program. You do students a disservice if you do not prioritize the skill development material in the course. In a two-hour tutorial, you should spend one hour on course content and the other hour on skill-related material (although course content may well be the vehicle for skill building, and pre-teaching the course assignments is certainly part of skill development). Although the tendency might be to spend the second hour on skill development, sometimes teaching skill material in the first hour will emphasize its importance.

In order to raise student consciousness about university-level skills, you might begin and end the year with the Learning Objectives/Skills Assessment Questionnaires available at <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations/UniversitySkills.html>.

For these Foundations courses, it is important to realize both their possibilities and their limits. You have 24-25 additional hours with students (one hour a week). In that time, you can enhance the course focus on skill building but you cannot provide a total remedial package for students. For individual tutoring, you can send students to the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/caw>. Also encourage students to use etutor program of the CAW <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/caw/etutor.html>, and the Foundations Computer Assistance Program (F-CAP) <http://www.yorku.ca/fcap/>. For specific information on what these and other services can offer to Foundations students and instructors, see *Support Services for Foundations Courses* on the Foundations website [www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations](http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations).

### 2. CUPE 3903 (UNIT ONE) CONDITIONS OF WORK

If you are a Unit One TA, the CUPE 3903 contract specifies that you can only work a total of 270 hours over the duration of your appointment. This number of hours is probably not sufficient to do as good a job as you would like; nonetheless these are the limits and both faculty and TAs are obliged to abide by them.

Under the CUPE Collective Agreement, in consultation with TAs, faculty are required to prepare a workload form once each semester. On this form, the 270 hours is broken down into various tasks. The first form, prepared in September, is based on the assumption of 25 students in first year tutorials and 28 students in second year tutorials. The January form is prepared for the whole year based on the actual number of students in your tutorial and is a more accurate reflection of your workload.

In order to ensure clarity about how to use your hours, this *Handout* sets out some guidelines about grading which should help you manage your limited time effectively, and ensure the smooth running of the course, both for instructors and for students. Consult your course director for course-specific information.

You will probably wish that you had more time, or might choose to allocate your time differently but given the constraints of the CUPE collective agreement, you need to accept the limit of the TA position and work closely with guidelines offered by your course director. Additional work is not required or expected. It is incumbent on TAs to speak with course directors if and as soon as they have *any* concerns about completing their work within the specified hours.

### 3. SELF MANAGEMENT

You are responsible for monitoring and managing your hours. This *Handout* and information from your course director will establish guidelines around grading and preparation – probably the two most time consuming aspects of your work. However, your course director cannot know how you are spending your time. You need to be responsible to your students; watch that you are not spending more time than you should on preparation, grading or meeting with students; and if you perceive a problem, let the CD know immediately (as the CUPE contract specifies).

## **PART TWO: GUIDELINES ABOUT ASSIGNING GRADES**

Many students receive poor grades because they have failed to read and follow the instructions for an assignment. Since it is often difficult to get students to focus on the assignment instructions, pro-actively teaching students to work effectively with instructions is an important part of developing their skills. Where written instructions for assignments are available, it is often more effective to take questions from students rather than trying to go over the instructions. You also might have students present the instructions to the class and take questions from other students. You can also break students down into smaller groups and have each group prepare a short presentation on one section of the instructions.

In a presentation on evaluation, Professor Phyllis Rozendal from the Centre for Academic Writing underscored how daunting and time consuming grading can be. She suggested three principles in marking: being helpful in order to promote student learning; being fair and consistent in order to minimize student complaints; and being efficient given the limits on your time. Rozendal also stressed that graders should say something positive and cautioned against using humour since students often experience it as sarcasm.

### 1. GRADING SCALES

For more information on grading in the Faculty of Arts, see <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/advising/handbook2001/gradingsystem.html>.

FOR INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS AND COURSES USING A 100 GRADE POINT BASE: A+ 90-100; A 80-89; B+ 75-79; B 70-74; C+ 65-69; C 60-64; D+ 55-59; D 50-54; E 40-49; F 0-39. The university does not use minus grades for undergraduates.

#### FOR COURSES USING 150 GRADE POINT BASE

For AY 2004-5, Foundations instructors endorsed using 150 grades points as the base from which to grade for Foundations courses (to be translated into 100 at the end of the year). This approach helps to highlight the nine-credit nature of these courses, (i.e. it offers a visible indicator to the students that 50% more work is expected in a nine-credit course than in a six-credit course). This approach may address some of students' resistance to the Foundations workload.

FOR FINAL GRADES IN COURSES USING 150 GRADE POINT BASE: A+ 135-150; A 120-134; B+ 112-119; B 105-111; C+ 97-104; C 90-96; D+ 83-89; D 75-82; E 60-74; F 0-59.

### 2. ASSIGNING A GRADE

Grades are assigned for two reasons: first, to let students know how they are doing relative to university standards, and second, because they are the mechanism for progression through university. However, the value of time spent on *assigning* a grade is minimal since students do not learn much from the grades they receive. I have sometimes spent a lot of time deciding whether an assignment deserves a 72, 73 or 74; however, given how little these gradations matter to the final grade, it is not a productive use of your limited time. For example, on the exam worth 15% of the final grade, 77% of 15 = 5.7 and 75% of 15 = 5.6.

There are many different approaches to grading. I recommend a holistic approach to assigning a grade which studies show works well, is fair, and saves time. For holistic grading, read through the whole assignment (without writing comments as you go) and assign a grade based on your overall sense. Ask if this assignment is an A, B, C, borderline or failure. You will not find it difficult to get the assignments into these general groups. Once you have separated the assignments into major grade groups, you can look over the ones you have marked with a possible + to see if the assignment merits more.

When you grade holistically, you take account of both content and presentation. So it may be that you think the substance of the assignment is quite good but the presentation (clarity, writing, grammar etc) is poor. In such a case, you would lower the mark. A paper would never receive an A grade if it is not well presented.

#### CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT

Use criteria generated from the goals of an assignment as a reference point for your grading and comments. Be clear to students about these criteria. Identifying the key criteria against which you grade an assignment helps to establish consistent standards and minimizes students' sense that grading is subjective.

#### SETTING A STANDARD

Each time I grade an assignment, I need to develop a standard for the particular class. Usually I mark the first few assignments too hard (partly because I am using an abstract standard) and need to re-grade them once I have read the bulk of the assignments. Once I have identified the best submissions, I can ask myself if any of them should receive an A. Then I grade the rest of the assignments relative to these. The holistic approach (which means that you read through the whole set quickly) helps this process by allowing the student profile to set the standard.

#### CHECKLISTS AND GRADING SHEETS

Some tutorial leaders find it helpful to use checklists or grading sheets. They might have a sheet for each student and indicate, with checks or a highlighter, the strong and weak points of an assignment. They may or may not hand these back to students. Using such a checklist sometimes helps the grader to see the strengths and weaknesses of an essay and assign a grade more quickly. Although these lists can be useful, sometimes they can take more rather than less time. Given the limits on the time you have available for grading, only use checklists if they reduce your grading time.

Attach checklists to assignments and have students assess their own essays. In addition to clarifying the criteria for assessment, they offer a tool for students to read/edit and revise their essays. In tutorial, students can use checklists to identify the weaknesses in their own or other students' writing. See the Appendix for an example of a checklist which can be attached to an assignment. For more information on using checklists and grading sheets, see CST's *TA Handbook*.

#### MODEL ANSWERS

Do not develop model answers. Not only do you not have time to do this, it is really not necessary when you consider the purpose of grading and the ease of which you can categorize the assignments into the major grade groups. Model answers may also set unrealistically high standards for first year students.

#### RED PEN

Do not use red pen to mark up essays. Pencil comments are much less intrusive although it is best to write your grade in ink.

#### GRADE PROFILES

Grade profiles may be requested on some assignments by your Course Director. Such profiles help catch any large discrepancies in grade profile among the tutorial groups.

## **PART THREE: COMMENTING ON ASSIGNMENTS**

In a more perfect situation we would comment on many drafts of student work, and students would rewrite assignments several times. The York administration is not prepared to pay for such services. As a result, faculty are often forced to choose between students doing more assignments with limited feedback, or doing fewer assignments with a lot of feedback. Based on my experience, I am persuaded that students learn considerably more from doing their assignments than from comments on them. In fact, unless we give students class time to read over their papers, they may not even read the comments.

The guidelines, offered by your course director, for grading each assignment should indicate whether you should comment intensively, modestly or not at all on each assignment. Given the severe limits on your time, it is of most value to comment extensively when students will use your feedback to revise their work. For final exams, or even mid-term exams, it is not an effective use of your time to put any comments on individual papers. Do not spend more hours grading/commenting than are allocated on your workload form. Explain to the students the limits on your time; if they are dissatisfied, they should direct their comments to the administration of the university.

Rather than responding to every problem on an assignment, use criteria generated from the goals of an assignment as a reference point for your comments. Your comments, then, should give students a sense of how well they have met the requirements of the assignment, and whether they are working up to university standards. From your comments, students should be able to identify a *key* problem with their assignment. It is helpful to remember that you are commenting on the assignment, not editing it. Given the limited time available to write comments on each paper, you will likely want to write them after you have read through the paper and assigned a holistic grade.

### 1. GENERIC COMMENTS

Although we want to give students the kind of feedback that will help them improve, comments on individual assignments are not the only and often not the best vehicle to this end, and they can be very time consuming to write. It is often more effective to give generic feedback to the whole class rather than repeating similar comments on each paper. I have often wasted a lot of time writing the same kind of comment on many papers. In contrast, it is an excellent use of your time to prepare some general comments on the assignments for the whole class. Holistic grading facilitates this process since, as you read through the whole set, you will quickly identify the major (and oft-repeated) problems.

Do not assume that general comments will be less effective than individual comments, especially when they are discussed in tutorial. Indeed, students often barely read our comments once they have looked at the grade; even more rarely do they re-read their own essay to consider the comments in relationship to what they have written.

### 2. MARKING GRAMMAR AND SPELLING ERRORS

Grammar and spelling errors are the easiest to note when we are reading an assignment. However, research suggests that marking such errors may overwhelm students and rarely changes their writing. Extensive corrections suggest the paper was terrible; and often students don't read the rest of the comments. When we mark all grammar and spelling errors, too often students assume that their low grades can be explained by such mistakes. It is important that what students learn from your oral and written comments are the *key* problems with their assignment. Rather than highlighting all such errors, the best strategy is to mark up one paragraph or page completely to demonstrate grammar and spelling problems. This strategy will also save you time and allow you to focus on the substance of the paper, and issues of organization, clarity, argumentation and citation. You might find it useful to explain to students that you are in dialogue with their text. When you note grammar errors, you are pointing out to them a break in their communication with you as reader.

### 3. POST TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS

One of the most important of teaching tasks regards the follow-up on assignments when you return them.

- \* Talk about the strengths and weaknesses in the assignments overall.
- \* Have students re-read their own assignment and your comments carefully, and also note where your general comments apply.
- \* Have students identify the main revision they would need to make in order to improve the paper and their grade.
- \* Have each student exchange her assignment with another student. Have them use the checklists attached to the assignment to assess the paper they are reading. Often what students cannot see in their own writing, they are able to see in the writing of other students. Build in other forms of peer review of essay drafts. Study Groups are an excellent vehicle for students to learn from each other. For more information on setting up study groups, see <<http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations/StudyGroupsInfo.html>>.
- \* In order to help students understand what constitutes an A paper, read selections of A papers to the class, and for contrast, paragraphs from a B and C paper. Do not identify the students.
- \* Grade definitions should be used as part of your discussion of the first graded assignment. They help to give students a realistic understanding of university expectations, especially for an A paper. For more information on grading in the Faculty of Arts, see <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/advising/handbook2001/gradingsystem.html>.

## **PART FOUR: OTHER ISSUES ABOUT GRADING**

### 1. EXPLAINING THE GRADING SYSTEM TO STUDENTS

It is useful to have a discussion with students about all aspects of the grading system early on in the year and to direct them to the Faculty of Arts grades definition material

<<http://www.arts.yorku.ca/advising/handbook2001/gradingsystem.html>>.

Although the breakdown of the grades is available on the course outline, sometimes first year students mistakenly assume that if they improve over the year, their earlier grades will not matter. Sometimes students need a certain grade point average to remain in a program or maintain a scholarship. If they need to complete the course with a B+, then they need to maintain a B+ average, perhaps with the help of FCAP and the CAW. Encourage students to keep a record of their grade on each assignment. They are then able to calculate how they are doing.

It is also useful to talk about their grade expectations. Often students make unrealistic assessments about the quality of their work, and expect the same level of grades they received in high school. Since university standards are considerably higher, they should expect lower grades. In fact, developing a range of new skills to satisfy university standards is an important part of their first year learning.

### 2. PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC HONESTY

Evidence suggests that the incidence of plagiarism is very high. For example, in a 1999 survey of American students conducted by the Centre for Academic Integrity at Duke University, 68% of the 2100 students polled said they had committed at least one academic offence such as plagiarizing.

Attached to the course outline is an information sheet for students on Academic Honesty. Students in most first year Foundations courses are also required to complete the on-line tutorial on academic integrity. [http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic\\_integrity/](http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/). This tutorial should be used in conjunction with active teaching. See *Ideas for Integrating the Academic Integrity Tutorial into Courses* <[http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic\\_integrity/ideabank.html](http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/ideabank.html)>.

York University has very complex rules to deal with plagiarism. Even if you are certain a student has plagiarized, you cannot penalize a student. You have to assume it is the student's work and initiate the process as described in the Faculty of Arts "Academic Honesty: Procedural Guidelines" For more information, students should see <<http://www.arts.yorku.ca/honesty/students.html>>. For the full university policy, see <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhone.htm>>.

If you think a student has plagiarized or cheated by purchasing an essay or using one from another student, speak to your course director before you do anything. It is helpful if you can find the source. In most cases, the CD will meet with you and the student. These meetings often expose the plagiarism if the student is unable to explain material from her essay in her own words.

Keep a copy of any suspicious assignment -- especially those which seem too good for the grade level you are teaching. Often times, it turns out that the student has bought or copied it. This fact might emerge after the student has written an exam, or done several assignments. It helps the overly-complicated university process to have such assignments on file. You can also collect back mid term tests and keep them on file as a comparison base. You can return the tests after you have handed back the final essays.

Although York has a very formal process of dealing with any sort of cheating, you might also bring cheating to the attention of the group as a whole (without naming the culprit). A class discussion can highlight the fact that cheating and plagiarism degrade the university experience, help students think about how cheating affects them, and discourage re-offending and cheating by others. Such a process may also make the cheaters realize that their behaviour is not socially acceptable among their peers. For your information, there is an excellent and extensive Guide to Plagiarism on the University of Alberta library website <[www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism](http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism)>.

### 3. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION GRADES

I have found it useful to distinguish attendance and participation grades. Attendance is an objective criteria and does not penalize a student who attends class regularly but who may not be an active contributor to class discussions. A student may also have good reasons for missing class. Assigning separate grades for attendance and participation also means that a student is not penalized twice for these absences, that is, the assessment of participation rests on behaviour when present.

A participation grade is not based on the number of times a student speaks, but reflects an assessment of her overall preparation, informed contribution to class discussion (i.e. evidence of having done the readings), and responsiveness to the presentations and comments of other students. Many course directors include participation grades; however, given the very subjective nature of participation grades and the fact that participation grades may impact negatively on class discussion, I have often decided against grades for participation and have allocated attendance grades, and grades for small assignments done in tutorial.

In my course, TAs are given a guideline not to negotiate with students about what is a legitimate absence. Although many absences are legitimate, if a student is away, she misses the work and is marked absent. This eliminates policing absences and room for subjective assessment. The only exception is for students who register late to the course. If they miss the first one or two tutorials for this reason, they should not be marked absent.

You may also want to have a policy about students who leave at the break and don't return or those who come in late. I note these as missing half the class. Let students know what your policy will be. If you are giving half attendance for those who come very late or leave very early, keep careful track for your final grade roster.

Finally since students tend to see attendance as an individual issue, you may want to have a class discussion about attendance, in particular eliciting the feelings of students who attend regularly. You may find this statement a useful reference point in the discussion. It is part of the "course policies" section of the Course Outline Template available on the Foundations website <[www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations](http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations)>.

Tutorial attendance is important for your individual learning. Continuity in attendance is also a responsibility to the tutorial group. Students who miss tutorials frequently are not only out of the conversation loop but also have a negative impact on the learning of others. Make a commitment to attending tutorials not only for yourself but also for the whole group.

#### A SCALE FOR ATTENDANCE GRADES

One approach to ensuring consistency across tutorials is to set an attendance scale. Assuming your tutorial meets 24 times, here is a suggested scale. Adjust the scale if you meet more or fewer times. In January, remind students about the importance of attendance. You will have to keep careful attendance records, not only to assign the grades but also because attendance is recorded on the final roster submitted to the Division at the end of the year. Report the number of classes missed.

If a student attends all 25 classes, s/he will receive 5/5. If s/he misses 1 class = A+(4.5); 2 = A(4); 3 = B+(3.8); 4 = B(3.5); 5 = C+(3.3); 6 = C(3); 7 = D+(2.8); 8 = D(2.5); 9 = E(2); 10 = F(1); 11 = F(0)

Also see university policy on "Religious Observance and Statutory Dates:

<http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/importantdates/religiousdates.htm>

#### 4. REWRITE POLICY

Given the dense workload in Foundations courses for both for students and instructors, an open-ended rewrite policy is likely not a good idea. In exceptional circumstances (for eg. a student has failed an assignment), you might suggest that a student rewrite. However, a difficulty with allowing students to re-write is that they have had the benefit of your comments on their papers and to the tutorial. This obviously gives them a considerable advantage. Overall, you should offer the option of rewriting in only very exceptional situations. In any case, always assign students a grade for their original work since many say they will rewrite and then do not do it. Finally, it is often better to advise students to work hard on the rest of their assignments rather than to re-write an assignment (which might mean they get behind on their other work).

#### 5. PRE-MARKING/MARKING DRAFTS

Students, especially those in first year, are often nervous about their assignments and might ask you to look over a draft. Although this would be helpful to students, you really do not have the time to do this kind of work. You should explain the limits on your time to students and encourage them to use CAW and *etutor*. Also suggest to students that they share their drafts with members of their study groups.

You might also encourage students to come to your office hours (well ahead of when the assignment is due). Certainly during that time, it would be appropriate to go over parts of their assignments with them. You need to stress, however, that the fact that you have gone over their assignment with them does not guarantee that they will receive an A grade.

Here is a text you can include with course assignments:

#### FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS

You probably would like your TA to look over a draft. Unfortunately she does not have the time to do this kind of work. However, there are some options for you:

- i) Visit your TA in her office hour with your draft. She will be able to spend some time looking it over with you.
- ii) Sign up for a tutor in the Centre for Academic Writing [CAW]. If you plan ahead, you will be able to take your draft to your tutor. For more information on the CAW, see <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/caw/>
- iii) Plan ahead and use the e-tutor service. Send your draft to [etutor@yorku.ca](mailto:etutor@yorku.ca) and you will receive comments within one week.
- iv) Exchange papers in your study groups. Given the shared knowledge of the material, such feedback might be very helpful.

#### 6. DISCUSSIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR GRADES

To ensure that your discussion with a student is fruitful, wait one week before meeting with her. Insist that in advance of your meeting, she read over the instructions, her assignment, and your comments. She should identify the weaknesses and strengths in her paper based on her careful re-reading, on your comments on paper, and your comments to the whole class. Encourage her to share her thoughts at the beginning of the meeting. Can she explain what prevented her from getting a better grade? Often when students take the time to consider their papers in depth, they are able to see the problems with them. This is a very important step in their learning how to edit and revise.

Although students have a right to understand why they have received a particular grade, you can approach this holistically, that is, you do not have to explain any kind of breakdown -- four points for grammar etc.

If students are dissatisfied with a grade or want to understand why they were assigned a particular grade, they should speak to you promptly. Not infrequently, students see course directors after they receive their final grade requesting their grade be raised perhaps so they can stay in a particular program.

#### 7. GRADING STANDARDS, BALANCING THE 'FREE' GRADES AND STUDENT PROFILE

One of the problems with teaching is the dramatic range of ability across the group. Although our goal is to help students work to fulfil their individual potential, there is no doubt that you will only have a few students who can easily do the course work and receive an A. For many, perhaps most students, they will only read some of the material, do average assignments, fail to follow assignment instructions despite written handouts, and not take full advantage of what the course has to offer. This is a reality. We can neither teach only to the top students, or to the weakest, but we do need to recognize this spread of ability. You should not be discouraged if most of your students are in the C+ range. This is to be expected. Since students can often receive near perfect grades for attendance, and other small assignments, you should feel comfortable using high standards to grade their written work.

## 8. GRADING EXERCISES WITH STUDENTS

A very effective way to teach students about grading standards is to have them do some grading themselves.

Here are two suggestions that you might use over the year:

a) Before you hand back an assignment, have students switch (clean) copies of their papers, and using the criteria in the assignment and the grades definition sheet, assign a grade and write one paragraph justifying the grade they have given their partner.

b) Prior to the tutorial when you will hand back an assignment, have students read over their own assignment and assign and justify a grade. In tutorial, they can then compare it to the grade you have given the assignment. Ask them to read your comments carefully to see if they can explain the discrepancy between the grade they assigned and the one you assigned.

## 9. RECORD KEEPING, RECORDING GRADES AND CALCULATING FINAL GRADES

There is a lot of record keeping in Foundations course. In addition to attendance, the assignments are often divided into parts. You will need to set up a good system since at the end of the year, the Division requires fairly detailed information. When there is a grade petition, it is critical to have all this detail.

At the end of the year, you will be required to submit letter and number grades for each assignment. So in your grade book, record the grade, the % grade, and the letter grade. If you keep track of these three marks for each assignment, you will find it much easier to do your final grades. If you subtract marks for a late assignment, please keep track of the original mark and the late penalty.

In second semester, roster sheets, which will eventually be handed into the Division, will be available for recording these grades. Grade roster sheets will be supplied only once so when you receive your roster, make several copies. They can get messy over the year and you may need to recopy the information to provide a clean copy for the Division records. You are required to use these sheets to hand in the final grades.

Although it might make sense to add up small assignments in order to simplify your grade roster, record each grade separately so if it is queried, full information will be available.

**Most grade petitions are a result of mistakes in calculating final grades. Please add your final grades twice to ensure they are correct.**

### RAISING FINAL GRADES

Check the course policy about rounding up final grades since it is important that there be consistency across tutorials. In my course, only final grades that come out to a .7, .8 or .9 (for eg. a 69.8 or 79.9) are raised. The goal is to grade carefully throughout the year and then let the final grade come out as it does. Calculations show that for a student's grade to be .1 or .2 higher, she would actually need a slightly higher grade on every assignment, or a much higher grade on one. So raising .7, .8 and .9 grades is already generous.

On your grade roster, record the final grade without rounding it out. If it is a .7, .8 or .9 grade, write the raised grade beside the final calculation.

## 10. LATE PENALTIES, EXTENSIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS AND DEFERMENTS

The course outline will indicate penalties for late assignments which should be strictly adhered to unless there are extraordinary circumstances. Effective time management is a critical skill for university students. Offering and adhering to clear guidelines about the schedule for assignments supports the development of this skill.

Consistency across the tutorials about accepting late work is critical. Invariably the students hear of different practices and complain to course directors. Research shows that an extraordinary percentage of students will lie in order to get an extension. Although we do want to be sympathetic to student concerns, it is also important to be firm.

Here is an example of a text which can be included in assignment directions or the course outline.

**PENALTIES FOR LATE ASSIGNMENTS:**

You will lose 5% for assignments up to one-week late, and 10% for assignments up to two-weeks late. This means that if an assignment is from one to seven days late, it will lose 5%. So if you received a 65% on the assignment (6.5/10), you would lose 5% and receive 60% or 6/10. No assignment will be accepted more than two weeks late.

Assignments are due in the tutorial on the date specified in the course outline. An assignment handed in any time after this tutorial is considered late. Do not ask for special extensions for late assignments. Over the years we have established that the fairest approach is to maintain a consistent rule for all situations. This ensures that all students in all tutorials are treated in the same way.

Effective time management is a critical skill for university students. Adhering to the schedule for assignments supports the development of this skill. Late penalties on many assignments can have a very negative impact on your final grade. It is recommended that you have each assignment done one week before it is due. This will help you deal with any unexpected emergencies.

Do not slip assignments under the office door of the professor or tutorial leader. Hand your assignments directly to your tutorial leader unless you have made other arrangements with her.

**11. ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING OR PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES**

Although students with learning disabilities (LD) are often given accommodation in the form of extra time to write exams, for assignments, they are subject to the same assignment deadlines as other students. As stated on the course outlines, you can make special arrangements with them for up to two weeks after the assignment is due (for eg. to waive any late penalty). Some LD students assume that because of exam accommodation, they have rights to any extensions they wish. In fact, the LDP does not negotiate for assignment extensions but rather encourages students to take fewer courses. If they need longer extensions, please consult with your course director.

For students with the added burden of LD, time management is a critical skill. You might encourage LD students to make appointments with the Learning Skills Program (which sees students on an individual basis) to improve their TM skills. (Contact information: 148 Behavioural Sciences Building 416-736-5297 [lsp@yorku.ca](mailto:lsp@yorku.ca) [www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp](http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp)).

**12. ILLNESS ON THE DAY OF EXAM**

There is no provision for re-writing examinations, and students do not have an automatic right to do a make-up test or exam. If a student has a very good reason for missing an exam, she can apply to the course director to do a make-up exam within 48 hours of the missed exam. Unlike assignments which students have many weeks to complete, the exam is scheduled only at one time. It is for this reason that greater flexibility is required for students who miss exams. If the course director is unwilling to agree to such a deferral, the student can petition for permission at the end of the school year.

Here is a text which can be included in the course outline.

#### GUIDELINES: ILLNESS ON DAY OF EXAM

Sometimes students assume that if they are sick, they can miss the exam and a make-up exam will be scheduled for them. This is not true. Students have no automatic rights to make-up exams. A make-up exam may be scheduled but only in quite exceptional circumstances; otherwise students can appeal through the university appeals procedures.

If you are too sick to make the exam, you will need a detailed doctor's note. This note must state why you were unable to write the exam *on that day*. If you miss the exam, please call the course director and leave a voice message (with the name of your tutorial leader). Also leave a message for your tutorial leader. Include a number where you can be reached. You should do this within 48 hours of the exam. If you are too sick to phone, have a friend phone.

#### 13. DEALING WITH REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS

Check with your course director about policy on extensions. In response to the troubling increase in time-consuming requests for special accommodation, no assignments will be accepted after two weeks in my course. In fact, many of the extensions granted in the past did not solve a problem but created additional ones. When students approach my TAs for extensions, often indicating a family or personal emergency, I encourage them to be sympathetic. However, I suggest they explain the importance of a consistent policy, the difficulty of adjudicating issues around lateness, and the value of good time management which means finishing assignments one week ahead of time and allows for inevitable emergencies.

Undoubtedly there will continue to be requests for such accommodation. If you think a student has faced a very very serious problem, consult with your course director. The first question the CD will likely ask is about the record of the student in terms of attendance and grades. For a reasonably good student who has demonstrated commitment to the course and her work, an extraordinary extension beyond the two weeks might be considered.

#### 14. POSTING STUDENT GRADES/FINAL GRADES

Check your course policy about posting grades on your office door since it is important that there be consistency across tutorials. The policy in my courses is not to post any grades on office doors. If students want their grades, and their marked assignments, they need to attend class or see their TA in office hours.

Although some faculty give out final grades, it is actually against university policy since in theory at least, the grades we submit are supposed to be reviewed at the departmental and faculty level. In fact, grades are not considered 'official' until they are released by the Registrar's Office. Check your course policy about giving out final grades. If one TA offers final grades, all the tutorial leaders will be faced with these requests.

Indicate to students that usually at the end of May, students can access their final grades on the registrar's site <<http://www.registrar.yorku.ca>>. Click on "Report of Final Grades". They will need a password to login, available from "Manage My Services" at <<http://apps.yorku.ca>>.

#### 15. GRADE REAPPRAISALS AND PETITIONS

Within 21 days of the posting of final grades, students can request a grade reappraisal through the Social Science office. There is a Divisional Committee which screens such requests. After the 21 days, students must petition through the Registrar's Office. Normally petitions will not be considered more than one year beyond the date of the release of grades. Students who have failed a course may petition to have the failure removed from their record, that is, a late withdrawal without penalty.

## 16. DEFERRMENTS

In extraordinary circumstances, for example, where good students have faced serious illnesses during the academic year, it is possible for them to request a lengthy deferral to complete course assignments. To apply for a deferral, students need to fill out a 'Deferred Standing Agreement' which they can find at <[www.yorku.ca/yorkweb/cs.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/yorkweb/cs.htm)> and submit the request to course director. The course director will confer with the student's tutorial leader before making a decision.

## **PART FIVE: GUIDELINES FOR GRADING EACH ASSIGNMENT**

This section offers an example of what guidelines for grading each assignment might look like. Note that the assignments referred to here are posted on the Foundations website <[www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations](http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations)>.

1. **Reading in Different Voices:** the goal is to give students a sense of how well they have met the requirements of the assignment, and whether they are working up to university standards. Rather than engaging with their interpretations of the articles, focus on feedback about the extent to which they fulfilled the requirements of the assignment (i.e., have they written in three different voices, actually 'summarized', 'evaluated' etc). One or two comments are sufficient. If a student's writing is a problem, immediately send her to the CAW to sign up for a tutor.

2. **Essay Step #1:** in your comments, focus on whether students have understood the question, done an outline based on it, and expressed a point of view.

The purpose of this step is two-fold: first, to prevent them from doing their essay without answering what the question asks. Often students do not read the question properly but pick up a key word (prostitution, for example), write about it and basically ignore the question.

The second purpose is more complex: to have them begin to develop an informed point of view by becoming self-conscious about what they think at the beginning of the research process. When they have read their sources for Step #2, they often change their "opinion". They recognize that they were poorly informed and had not really considered the issues fully, and so understand something about the purpose of 'research'. In order to create the conditions for this to happen, they need to articulate their starting place. Interestingly, cognitive psychology asserts that students' preconceptions need to be determined prior to their learning new concepts. This assignment is structured to ensure this process.

3. **Essay Step #2:** this is the assignment on which you should comment intensively. Offer detailed comments as necessary to give students direction. However, beware of substituting your own thinking for that of the student. You should not redesign the essay for them but give them direction about how to redesign or improve it themselves.

In "Responding to Student Writing", Nancy Sommers notes: "The challenge we face as teachers is to develop comments which will provide an inherent reason for students to revise; it is a sense of revisions as discovery, as a repeated process of beginning again, as starting out new, that our students have not learned. We need to show our students ... through our comments why new choices would positively change their texts, and thus to show them the potential for development implicit in their own writing" [*College Composition and Communication* 33 (May 1982): 156].

On this assignment, you should engage with the substance of their work. Treat them as scholars developing an argument. Hopefully such an approach will encourage them to clarify and strengthen their point of view.

4. **Essay Step #3:** grades only. Given the constraints of the 270 hours, you do not have the time to write comments on the final essay. As an alternative, while you are grading the assignments, note the generic tendencies/patterns and relevant general comments. Discuss the major items in class. See students who have more detailed questions in your office hours.
5. **Midterm Exam :** no comments but go over the test in class.
6. **Final Exam:** no comments necessary since final exams are not returned to students.

### **Appendix: EXAMPLE OF A CHECKLIST**

Before you hand in your essay, use this checklist to ensure that your essay is complete. If you find problem areas, revise before you hand the essay in. For your information, this checklist is also used by your tutorial leader as a reference point for grading your assignment.

i) Do you have a clear introduction? Does it identify the thematic and organizational structure of the essay? Does it indicate the point of view you will argue?

ii) Have you organized the material effectively, that is, is the sequence of presentation appropriate?

Is the presentation reader-friendly, that is, do you indicate clearly the transitions from one section/argument/theme to the next? Do you use headings and sub-headings appropriately?

Have you eliminated any repetition of arguments?

iii) Have you made a persuasive argument to support your informed point of view? Have you addressed both sides of the debate?

iv) Have you used relevant source material?

v) Have you carefully referenced all your sources, both direct quotations and paraphrasing?

vi) Do you have a clear conclusion?

vii) Have you answered ALL parts of the question?

viii) Have you included a bibliography?

ix) Have you corrected all typing, spelling, punctuation and grammar errors? Do not rely on spell check programs on the computer. For example, if you use 'there' instead of 'they're' or 'their', the spell check program is of no help.

x) Is your assignment the required length?