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New England Faculty Development Consortium (May 24th, 2022): Grading for Learning at the University of Rhode Island

Anna Santucci
University College Cork, Ireland

Julianna C. Golas
University of Rhode Island, jgolas@uri.edu

Katie E. Amaral
University of Rhode Island, Katie_Amaral@uri.edu

Alissa H. Cox
University of Rhode Island, alibba@uri.edu

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Grading for Learning @ University of Rhode Island

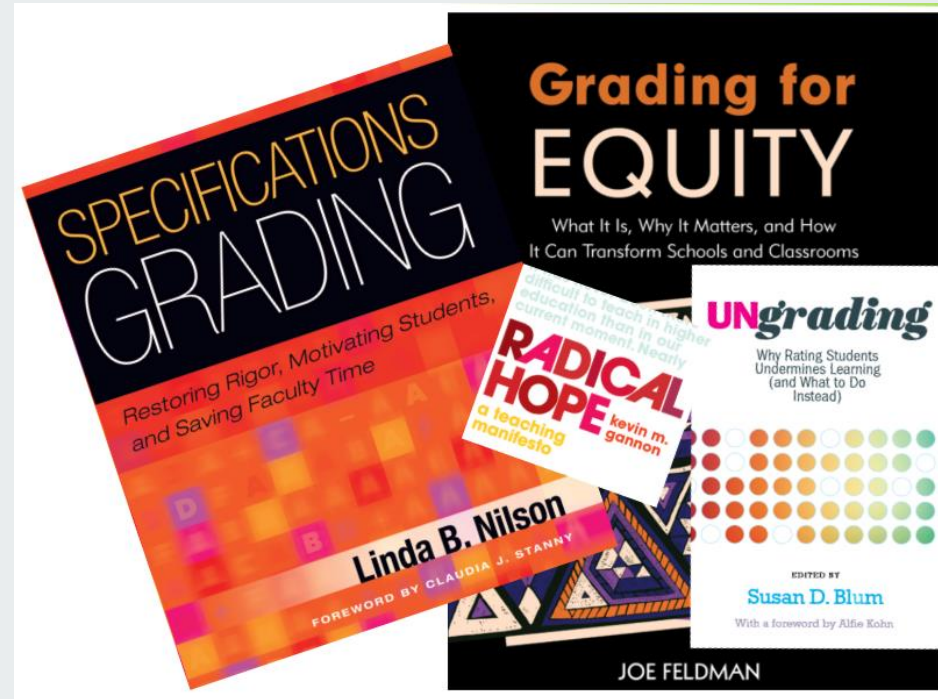
Anna Santucci, Ph.D., she/lei/sie/ella
Senior Lecturer in Teaching & Learning
Enhancement (CIRTL), Univ College Cork (Ireland)

Former: Faculty Development (Advancement of
Teaching & Learning), University of Rhode Island

Julianna C. Golas, M.S.
Senior Lecturer in Human Dev. & Family Science
University of Rhode Island

Katie E. Amaral, Ph.D. she/her
Lecturer in Chemistry
University of Rhode Island

Alissa H. Cox, Ph.D., she/her
Clin. Assistant Professor in Natural Resources Sci.
University of Rhode Island



Virtual Encouragements

- Zoom name OK? (pronouns, institution)
- Meet your colleagues via gallery view
- You can enable live transcription
- Permission to be “present” :-)
- Greetings in chat!



Photo by [Chris Montgomery](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Roadmap for the session



Drawing by [David Rickert](#)

Outcomes & Opening Reflection

Our story @ URI

What is Specs Grading? 3 examples @ URI

Breakout groups (Q&A) & debrief

Reflect: my next step

Wrap-up: addressing pushback & additional resources

In this session, I might increase my ability to:



- Articulate how my grading practices relate to my values as an educator and my beliefs about learning
- Identify one small change I can implement in one of my courses to better align its assessment structure with those beliefs and values
- and/or Evaluate the possibility of facilitating a Book club or designing a Learning Community for colleagues interested in exploring progressive assessment within my institutional context
- Connect with partners to help extend the conversation within my institution

Let's start with a personal reflection

What does a grade represent? What does it mean to “succeed” in my course? (and in my discipline?)

- a. How does what I “measure” reflect what I “value”?
- b. How do my grading practices reflect my values as an educator and my beliefs about learning?
- c. Based on those values and beliefs, what do I *want* my grades to represent?

Equitable Pedagogy @ URI

- Public Research University
- Predominantly white

2021 Academic Affairs

Action Agenda for Change:

“Work collaboratively with the leadership of the Faculty Senate, AAUP, the Office for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (ATL), and the colleges to expand diversity, social justice, and anti-racism professional development programs aimed specifically at administrators, deans, chairs/ program directors, faculty, and staff with a clear focus on both curriculum content and inclusive pedagogy in teaching and learning”



Promoting Equitable Assessment @ URI

2019 to 22 Leveraging the moment: Equity for learners **AND** teachers

- ❖ ATL Conversations, Town Halls, Bootcamps
- ❖ **No** institutional remote proctoring
- ❖ Accessible assessment tools (web.uri.edu/atl/teaching/deij/)
- ❖ '19-20 Race, Equity & Learning; '20-21 Bandwidth Recovery
- ❖ 2021 Annual URI Teaching & Learning Showcase
 - Sharing faculty tips & successes
- ❖ 2021 Grading for Learning Faculty Learning Community
 - Specifications grading, Ungrading, faculty SoTL
 - Like-minded community



From: Santucci & Nasrollahian, JEDI Mind Trick? “Not the assessments you are looking for... (POD 2021 Conference)

Promoting Equitable Assessment @ URI

Leveraging the moment: Equity for instructors **AND** students

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 - **Sharing tips & strategies, building momentum**
- ❖ **2021 Grading for Learning Faculty Learning Community**
 - **Specifications grading, Ungrading, faculty SoTL**
 - **Like-minded community**

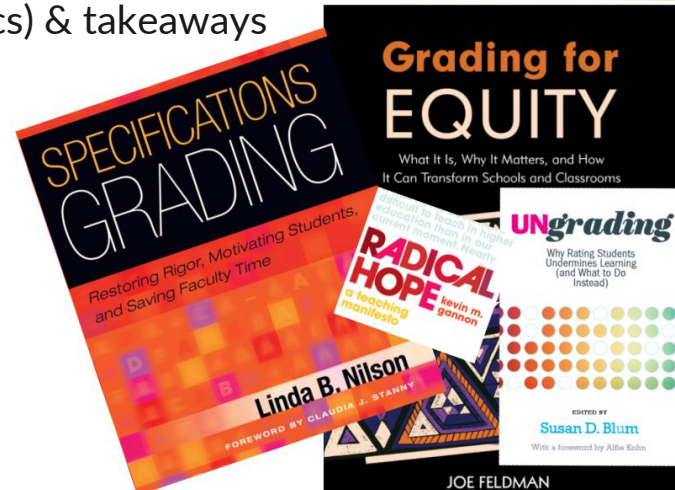


From: Santucci & Nasrollahian, JEDI Mind Trick? “Not the assessments you are looking for... (POD 2021 Conference)

Grading For Learning

Empowering Students with Agency for Growth

- ❖ Session 1: Community building; Unpacking key terms > Prep: Chapters 1-5 + quotes
- ❖ Session 2: generative conversation; Grading orientation > Prep: My orientation + 1 from Ch 6-12
- ❖ Session 3: Book jigsaw (self-picked); start hands-on work > Prep: My challenge + Ch 13 & Concl
- ❖ Session 4: guided project work time (esp. challenges & logistics) & takeaways
- ❖ Option to submit project worksheet for feedback (PD funds)
- ❖ Individual support and consultation
- ❖ web.uri.edu/atl/learning-community-grading-for-learning/
- ❖ web.uri.edu/atl/grading-for-equitable-learning/



"TRADITIONAL" VS "ALTERNATIVE" GRADING?

NOT a definition...

#ungrading
as a philosophy

Four Pillars (beta version)

So we are setting up a big tent with a lot of room underneath for anybody who wants to think about the sort of grading approaches being described here. Stealing shamelessly from our friends in the IBL community, I'd like to close here by visualizing this "tent" as a building with **four pillars**.



From: <https://gradingforgrowth.substack.com/p/finding-common-ground-with-grading>

grades take the focus off

Feedback

WHERE CAN YOU GO?

FOR? ITEMS

p.82

RUBRICS < REDUCTIVE? (EG. "I'M DONE")

UNIFORM TARGETS TIMELY

PRACTICE

PROCESSING + IMPLEMENTING FEEDBACK +

RETRIEVAL

GRADE = LEARNING START

RETENTION

OR? MEETING of

DISCIPLINE BAS

PREPARING FOR A WORLD OF POTENTIAL OPPRESSION (Stommel, p.34)

OUR CLASS PRACTICE = MODELING eg. mistakes Practice fix it!!

reducing T&L a mere transaction p.28

CAPITALIST SYSTEM

LEARNING ALONGSIDE

INTERDEPENDANCE GENEBSITY FROM PROBLEM SETS TO WORLD RESPONSIBILITY

PLAY!!!

FOR MYSELF VS SOMEONE ELSE

natural motivation

CURIOSITY

what happens growing up??

REWARD / TREAT TRAINING

Khori's "Punished by Reward"

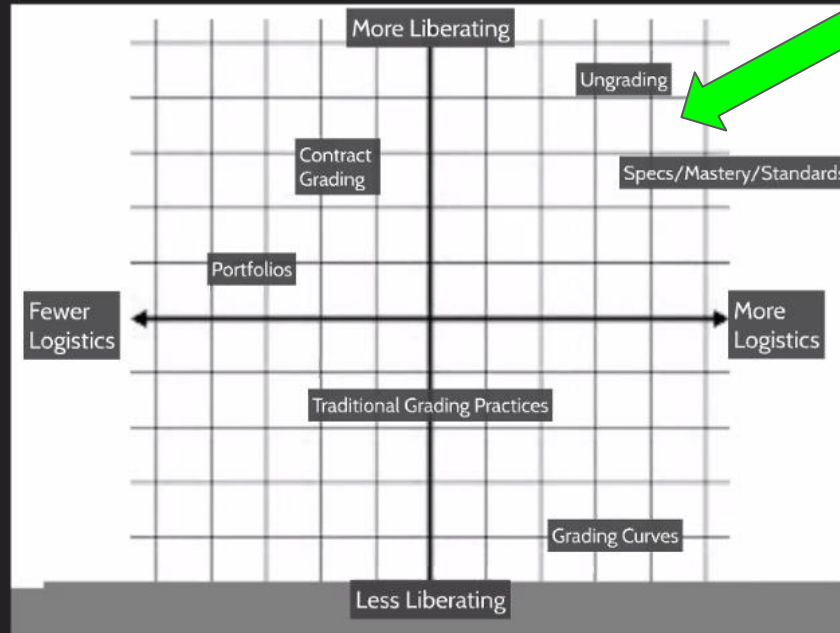
FEAR OF TAKING RISKS

ASSESS THE RISK YOURSELF

LEARNING → LANDED > IMPROVEMENT, OUTCOMES NEGOTIATED NEVER FINISHES (BASED)

IMPROVEMENT, OUTCOMES NEGOTIATED NEVER FINISHES

Teaching as liberatory practice: How progressive grading models can help students focus on learning rather than evaluation



From: Joshua Eyler, *How Grades Can Undermine Learning and Jeopardize Our Students' Wellbeing* (ITLC Lilly Online Conference, May 2021)

What Is Specifications Grading?

“Specifications grading is an alternative approach to grading that prioritizes **transparency**; student **mastery of learning objectives**; careful **alignment** between assessments and learning objectives; and **process** and **growth-oriented** approaches to learning. Since 2014, when Linda Nilson published her book, *Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time*, interest in specifications grading among instructors across US institutions of higher education has surged (Nilson and Stanny 2014).

... is premised on **transparency** and **progress-oriented feedback**, with the goals of increasing student **motivation**, fostering clear **communication**, and achieving educational **equity** (Winkelmes et al. 2016).”

SPECIFICATIONS



- # OF ASSIGNMENTS/COMPONENTS
- PAGE LENGTH/WORD COUNTS
- DUE DATES
- RUBRIC COMPONENTS (B-LEVEL)

BUNDLES



- COLLECTIONS OF ASSIGNMENTS GROUPED BY:
 - LEARNING OBJECTIVE
 - COMPLEXITY/DIFFICULTY
 - TYPE
- CHOICE

FEEDBACK



- EARLY AND FREQUENT
- FORMATIVE
- MEET SPEC/DOES NOT MEET SPEC

TOKENS



- EXCHANGE FOR REGRADES, LATE SUBMISSIONS, DROPS, MISSED CLASSES
- LIMITED QUANTITY

Adriana Streifer, Michael Palmer, Dorothe Bach
University of Virginia, Center for Teaching Excellence

What Is Specifications Grading?

Letter grade earned by assignments bundles (instead of weighted average calculation)

Bundles differentiated by: assignments quantity, work difficulty/complexity, or both

Specifications: Clear, comprehensive expectations/criteria for each assignment:

- Tied to the course objectives
- Level that indicates “acceptable” amount of learning
- Binary evaluation system: meets > credit (instead of parsing fine gradations)

Lowering the **stakes**: generally allows for (limited) revision opportunities

Instructors provide process-oriented **feedback** on each assignment

Adriana C. Streifer & Michael S. Palmer (2021) Is Specifications Grading Right for Me?: A Readiness Assessment to Help Instructors Decide, College Teaching, DOI: 10.1080/87567555.2021.2018396

What Is Specifications Grading?

Though not a panacea, addresses many students' and instructors' dissatisfactions, chiefly:

- **anxiety, motivation** shift from learning to evaluation (Chamberlin, Yasué, and Chiang 2018; Pulfrey, Buchs, and Butera 2011; Schinske and Tanner 2014)
- meaningful **feedback** (Butler and Nisan 1986; Kohn 2012)
- **time-consuming** (Crisp 2007)
- educational **inequities** (Link and Guskey 2019; Feldman 2019).

Success depends on its **implementation** (design + circumstances + preparedness)

3 example approaches to Specs Grading @ URI...

Julianna Golas: **Lifespan Development Course - 100 seats**; mostly first-year and sophomore Human Development and Education majors; popular free elective course for other majors; recently approved as a general education course.

Alissa Cox: **Intro to Natural Resources; GenEd - 60-150 seats**; wide variety of students & Upper UG/Grad specialized topic - 15-25 seats; majors & Grad students

Kate Amaral: **Introductory Chemistry - 150 - 250 seats**; mostly first-year students, not chemistry majors, required

Describe the process of development from the time of conception to early adolescence

- Smart book Assignment

Identify the major theories associated with early and adolescent development

- Smart Book Assignment
- Module Worksheets

Recognize the influence the environment and culture can have on development

- Smart book Assignment
- Module Worksheets
- Case Study

Apply theories to help explain behaviors and make predictions about future behavior

- Case Study Meetings
- Book Club

Evaluate the efficacy of different theories in helping explain development

- Case Study
- Book Club

HDF 200: Lifespan Development (100 seats)

To earn a D in the course

- Complete weekly Smart Book Assignment
- Devote between 3-4 hours each week

To earn a C in the course

- Everything in D plus
- Complete all Module Notes
- Devote 4-6 hours per week

To earn a B in the course

- Everything in C plus
- Complete 3 Case Study Applications
- Devote 5-7 hours per week

To earn an A in the course

- Everything in B plus
- Participate in the HDF 200 Book Club
- Devote 8 or more hours per week

3 “Ram Tokens”



Instructor Perspective: Julianna's Key Takeaways

Designing a new class with specs grading in mind is easier than trying to adapt an old model.

Align your assessments with higher level learning goals

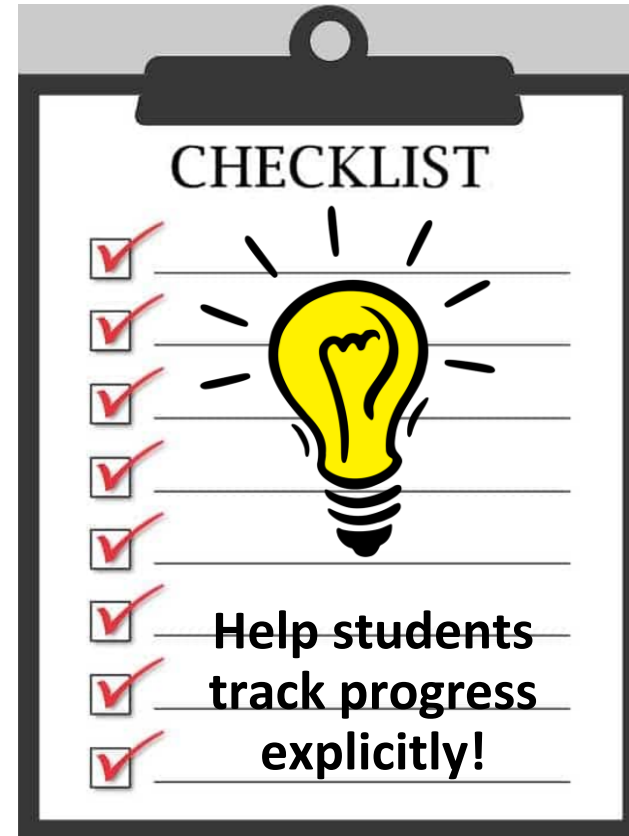
Instead of due dates use “Best by” dates

Build in an Amnesty week

Use a two item rubric “met the goal”/ “consider revising”

Alissa's version of Specs Grading

- Teach both:
 - “Survey” Course - intro to field AND GenEd (60-150 students)
 - Advanced UG/Grad course on interdisciplinary topic (~20 students)
- Focus on integration & real-world application of concepts
 - Lots of writing & peer review
- ID specific assignments ALL students must complete (summative + reflection assignments) = “minimum requirements”
 - Successively add other assignment categories / quantity (e.g. “any 6”) for higher grades



RAM Token 1

RAM Token 2

RAM Token 3

BONUS

Week 3

RAM

Week 7

Tokens

Week 13

Alissa's model - Undergrad GenEd

Minimum Reqs.

To earn a ...	D	C	B	A
Attend Field Trips	At least 2: <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__ <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__	At least 2: <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__ <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__	At least 3: <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__ <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__ <input type="checkbox"/> FT#__	<input type="checkbox"/> FT#1 <input type="checkbox"/> FT#2 <input type="checkbox"/> FT#3 <input type="checkbox"/> FT#4
Group Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Stand with group in Final (moral support) <input type="checkbox"/> Active in Google Slides Planning File	<input type="checkbox"/> Author on Final Tour <input type="checkbox"/> Speak <u>OR</u> Listed as Contributor in Final Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> W7 Peer Evals	<input type="checkbox"/> Author on Final Tour <input type="checkbox"/> Speak in Final Pres. <input type="checkbox"/> W7 Peer Evaluations <input type="checkbox"/> W15 Peer Evaluations	<input type="checkbox"/> Author on Final Tour <input type="checkbox"/> Speak in Final Pres. <input type="checkbox"/> W7 Peer Evaluations <input type="checkbox"/> W15 Peer Evaluations
KWL Charts & Assignments	<input type="checkbox"/> First KWL (W1) <input type="checkbox"/> Final KWL (W15)	<input type="checkbox"/> First KWL (W1) <input type="checkbox"/> Final KWL (W15) <input type="checkbox"/> Any Other Assignment: W#__	<input type="checkbox"/> First KWL (W1) <input type="checkbox"/> Rev 1 KWL (W5) <u>OR</u> Rev 2 KWL (W10) <input type="checkbox"/> W15 Rev. Art. Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Final KWL (W15)	<input type="checkbox"/> First KWL (W1) <input type="checkbox"/> Rev 1 KWL (W5) <input type="checkbox"/> Rev 2 KWL (W10) <input type="checkbox"/> W15 Rev. Art. Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Final KWL (W15)
Discussions & Peer interactions / reviews	<input type="checkbox"/> W1 Post + interaction <input type="checkbox"/> W11 Post + review <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Guided Notes <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Guided Notes <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Guided Notes <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Guided Notes <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Guided Notes <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Guided Notes	<input type="checkbox"/> W1 Post + interaction <input type="checkbox"/> W11 Post + review <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Post + Int/Rev <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Post + Int/Rev <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Post + Int/Rev <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Post + Int/Rev <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Post + Int/Rev <input type="checkbox"/> W#__ Post + Int/Rev	<input type="checkbox"/> Any 10 weekly posts + interactions/reviews	<input type="checkbox"/> Any 12 weekly posts + interactions/reviews
Quizzes	[None]	<input type="checkbox"/> W3 "Check, Please!" <input type="checkbox"/> W6 "Check, Please!"	<input type="checkbox"/> W3 "Check, Please!" <input type="checkbox"/> W6 "Check, Please!" <input type="checkbox"/> W8 Quiz <u>OR</u> W11 Quiz	<input type="checkbox"/> W3 "Check, Please!" <input type="checkbox"/> W6 "Check, Please!" <input type="checkbox"/> W8 Quiz <input type="checkbox"/> W11 Quiz

Everything
graded as:

Accept

Revise

Alissa's model - advanced UG / Grad Course

Everything graded

as:
Accept

Revise

Minimum Reqs.

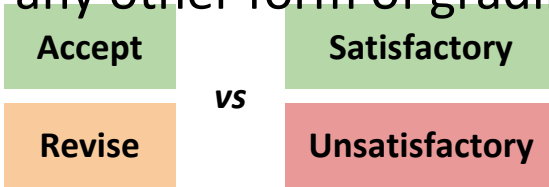
To earn a ...	D	C	B	A
Weekly Summaries (Discussions)	Introduction + at least 6/11	Introduction + at least 8/11	Introduction + at least 9/11	Introduction + at least 10/11
Peer Reviews (Discussions + Presentations)	At least 8/16	At least 10/16	At least 12/16	At least 13/16
2 Peer Teaching Presentations (based on instructor evaluation rubric)	Presented both; at least one does not meet 75% of expectations	Both meet >75% of expectations	At least one presentation meets all expectations	Both presentations meet all expectations
Course & Career Goal Reflections (Assignments/ Discussions)	<input type="checkbox"/> First & <input type="checkbox"/> Final Course goal reflections	<input type="checkbox"/> First & <input type="checkbox"/> Mid & <input type="checkbox"/> Final Course goal reflections	<input type="checkbox"/> First & <input type="checkbox"/> Mid & <input type="checkbox"/> Final Course goal reflections <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Job Application	<input type="checkbox"/> First & <input type="checkbox"/> Mid & <input type="checkbox"/> Final Course goal reflections <input type="checkbox"/> Job Applic. 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Job Applic. 2

Attendance @ end of semester:

- 0 unexcused absences = "+"
- 1-2 unexcused absences = no grade modifier
- 3-4 unexcused absences = "-"

Instructor's perspective: Alissa's key takeaways

- Will never go back to any other form of grading!
- Terminology matters



- Think carefully about “make-ups” or “redos” for assignments like presentations or peer reviews
 - Consider: reflections / lessons learned OR alternate assignments (student-curated resources...) - goal is to learn!
- Provide a mid-semester “check-in” grade
 - Help students understand grading scheme
 - “Still time to course-correct and earn the grade you want!” :)

Total Learning Outcomes (LO) = 3 + 22

3 Chapter modules are essential, and must be mastered to pass the course

A – 3 Essential + 18 Learning Outcomes

A- – 3 Essential + 17 Learning Outcomes

B+ – 3 Essential + 16 Learning Outcomes

B – 3 Essential + 15 Learning Outcomes

B- – 3 Essential + 14 Learning Outcomes

C+ – 3 Essential + 13 Learning Outcomes

C – 3 Essential + 12 Learning Outcomes

C- – 3 Essential + 11 Learning Outcomes

D+ – 3 Essential + 10 Learning Outcomes

D – 3 Essential

F – Less than D Work



Ram Tokens!

Can be used for

- Two extra tries* with a deadline extension
- Makeup for 1 absence
- Replace 1 HW assignment
- Trade in 3 Ram Tokens at the end of the semester for 1 LO

*May not be used on the metacognition assignments

Katie Amaral

CHM 101, URI

Specifications Grading

Free Redo on Chapter Modules!

Ran out of tries on a chapter module and don't want to hand in a Ram Token?

Meet with me or a TA (in-person or via Zoom) to go over the sticky concept for a free redo (3 total, can only be used once per chapter module)

Instructor's perspective: Kate's key takeaways

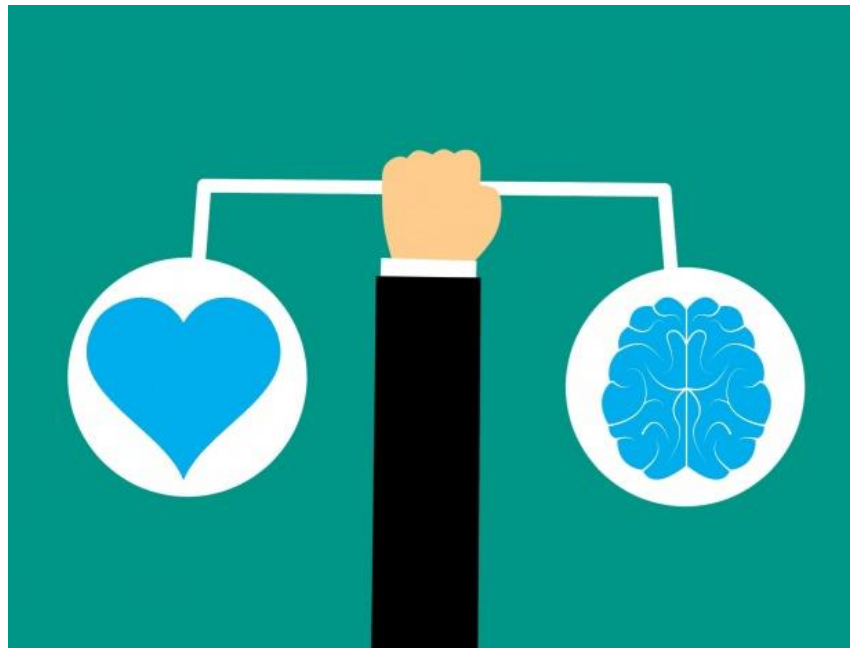
Token/Redo system critical!

More but faster grading

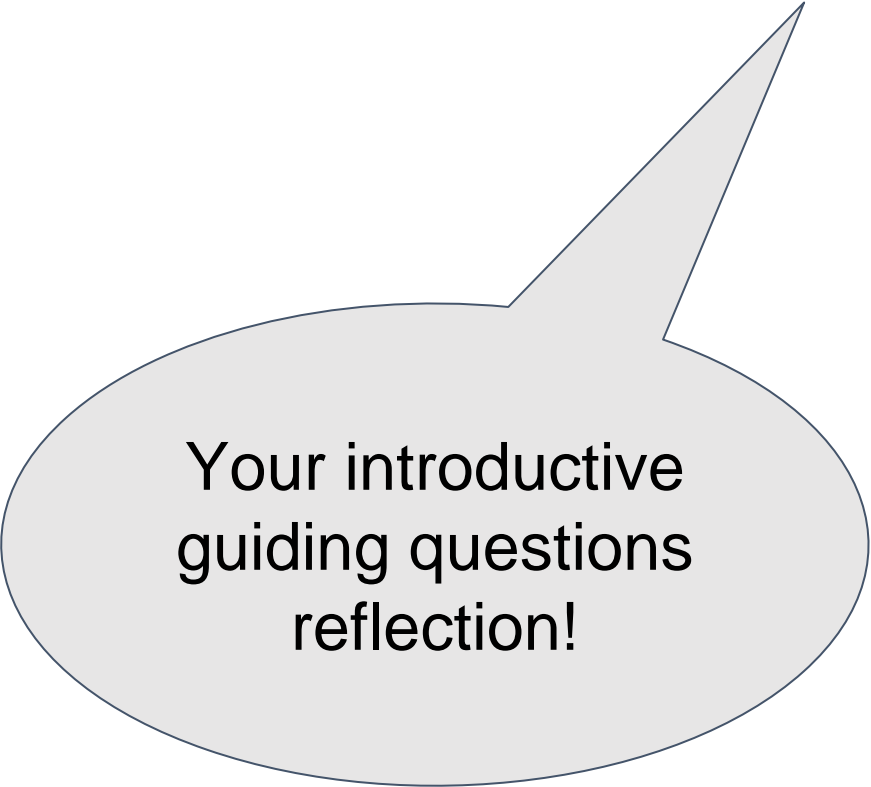
Less guilt!

Choose essential chapters carefully


Students learn and practice more
chemistry



Your turn! Breakouts: Bring with you...



Your introductive
guiding questions
reflection!



Any questions
for us you have
jotted down!

Breakout Group Topics - self-select!

Anna: Faculty Development

- Facilitating discussions
- Effective structures
- Lessons learned

Julianna: Starting with the End in Mind

- Distilling course outcomes
- Aligning assessments with outcomes

Kate: Redos

- Lessons learned
- Actual due dates vs “Best by” dates
- Suggestions for real-time assignments

Alissa: Class Size

- Large lecture courses (STEM)
- Medium lecture courses (STEM)
- Small writing-based courses
- Small STEM courses



Your plans

Take a moment to reflect and consider what your next steps or plans (or questions!) are related to Specs Grading...

Jot down a note or two for yourself to return to (perhaps over the summer?)



AND

Flexibility vs accountability

Expect pushback from students

- New approach - confusing?
- Towards end of course... (PANIC)

Pushback from colleagues

- Unfamiliar with alternate approaches
- "How is this preparing students for the real world?" - flexibility vs accountability
- Is this "fair"?

Less
flexibility

More
flexibility

More
accountability

*Specifications
grading*

Less
accountability

Themes from participating instructors' comments

- Explicit focus on learning outcomes
- Students' responsibility and autonomy
- Letting go of control > empowerment for all
- Stress
- Relationships



Slides & additional materials available here:

tinyurl.com/NEFDC22URI

If you have any thoughts and questions, we are one email away

Anna Santucci

asantucci@ucc.ie

annasantuccileoni@gmail.com

Julianna Golas

jgolas@uri.edu

Katie Amaral

katie_amaral@uri.edu

Alissa Cox

alibba@uri.edu

THANK YOU!

