CHAPTER 18.

LEARNING TO UNLEARN: GRADING CONTRACTS IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Michelle Stuckey

Arizona State University

Gabriella Wilson

Syracuse University

In this chapter, the authors describe **contract grading** *used in online, any time learning. Specifically, the authors focus on the affordances, such as the valuing of students' variable knowledges and writing processes, and challenges, such as student resistance to nontraditional assessment practices, for both students and teachers in implementing contract grading in online courses. In describing their "better practice," this chapter addresses the themes of assessment and professional learning for online teachers.*

FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES IN THIS CHAPTER

- **GSOLE OLI Principle 1.1**: All stakeholders and students should be aware of and be able to engage the unique literacy features of communicating, teaching, and learning in a primarily digital environment.
- **GSOLE OLI Principle 3.5**: Instructors and tutors should research, develop, theorize, and apply appropriate reading, alphabetic writing, and multimodal composition theories to their OLI environment(s).
- **CCCC's Postsecondary Principles for Writing, 9**: Sound writing instruction provides students with the support necessary to achieve their goals.

GUIDING QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

- What are the affordances of contract grading in online writing instruction related to flexible, individualized, and transparent assessment practices?

- How might contract grading support increased accessibility, equity, and inclusion in online writing courses?
- How might an instructor prepare students for the transition to contract grading? What conversations must be had and which resources must be provided in order to make this transition work?
- What assumptions about labor, entrenched ideologies around grading, and ideas about "good" writing do instructors need to reflect on and "unlearn" when transitioning to contract grading?

INTRODUCTION

As teachers of writing, and especially as teachers of online writing, we found ourselves conflicted by our feelings about grading, as have many others in this collection and across our field. We wanted to establish trust with our students, to connect with them as individuals, but the act of grading their work often created tension and exacerbated the distance between us and our students. In conversations with colleagues, we began to ask questions about grading. What is the role of grading? How do we fairly assess students in online writing classes?

As we looked for alternatives that might help us build trust and account for our students' unique needs as learners, we explored contract grading. Contract grading is a transparent, individualized method of assessment in which grading is distanced from feedback and criteria are simplified and clearly communicated to students. In exploring contract grading, we considered whether it might help us bolster the confidence of students in online, any time courses while building trust between students and instructors? Can contracts help us to unlearn harmful practices that reinforce instructors' assumptions about what makes "good writing"? These questions prompted us to develop grading contracts for our online writing classes. We dove into the process of developing contracts, revising and carefully thinking through possible issues and sources of confusion.

In doing so, we *hoped* developing grading contracts would alleviate the stress and anxiety so many students feel when confronted with a writing assignment, as we postulated that contract grading might lessen some of the cognitive overload online students in particular feel when encountering new learning situations. We *knew* that if we could break down the barriers that prevent students from just writing, if we could demonstrate that we really meant that *process* was more important than *product* through a simplified grading contract, they would embrace the new method. And they would just write because they wouldn't be worried about their grade. Right?

Not necessarily. Despite our attempts to demystify grading, students still found areas in our initial contracts that were unclear and imprecise. "What did

we mean by meaningful engagement?" "What counts as 'personal insight' or 'deep reflection'?" "What counts as substantial engagement with the course content?" Beyond these more abstract questions, students suggested that our contracts reified issues that arise with traditional assessment practices. For instance, students felt contracts might leave too much room for subjective interpretation—that they might continue to encourage students to write in order to please the teacher instead of taking risks that push their learning in new directions. Moreover, students felt that the contract wasn't flexible enough in allowing for unexpected situations to arise. These responses by students elucidate common anxieties students frequently attest to about grades (the anxieties we were attempting to alleviate).

We soon came to realize that student pushback is part of the process. As Joyce Inman and Rebecca Powell (2018) argued in "In the Absence of Grades," students have complex emotional responses to grades, as typically their identities as learners have been constructed in large part through grading systems. A radical departure from the standardized grading systems they are accustomed to requires a significant cognitive shift, which, as bell hooks wrote, "may not be welcomed by students who often expect us to teach in the manner they are accustomed to" (1994, pp. 142-143). What we envisioned as a way to engage in equitable grading practices actually caused some students anxiety.

The distance between teacher and student in online, any time courses poses additional challenges to student trust. In online learning environments, these questions and anxieties can be exacerbated as students navigate potentially new online learning environments and the particular stressors and isolation that online any time learning can foster (Bawa, 2016). But student pushback can also be understood as an important way to learn about students, their relationships and orientations to learning, and the role grading plays in those. What's more, it can help us understand what assumptions we need to unlearn, and what the gaps are in our contracts.

We adopted contract grading to build a more equitable foundation in our online, any time courses, both by being transparent about how we would assess student work, and by minimizing the subjective judgment that renders so many students fearful and angry about writing. In line with Asao Inoue's critique of how instructors judge student writing, we adopted contract grading as a way to focus on developing student writing rather than *judging* student writing based on our idea of the "ideal text." Inoue (2019) writes, "when we judge [student writing] we use convenient fictions, prototypes in our heads that are cobbled together from various examples" (p. 387). These convenient fictions are usually modeled after racialized ideals about White mainstream English language practices and formal academic writing and discourse.

Given the ways these fictions infiltrate and dominate writing studies, we came to realize that we too needed to *unlearn* our focus on the product and embrace the contract as always *in process*. We have learned to approach contract grading in the spirit of unlearning. It is not just our students who are being asked to unlearn years of grade-based disciplining that shapes how and why they write; we too have been disciplined by our institutions, our fields, our own identities as scholars, and the very language we take for granted when it comes to assessment as being transparent in meaning. Jack Halberstam (2012) underscored the importance of "learning to unlearn" as a way to break with, reform, and/or reshape

> disciplinary legacies . . . and the many constraints that sometimes get in the way of our best efforts to reinvent our fields, our purpose, and our mission. Unlearning is an inevitable part of new knowledge paradigms if only because you cannot solve a problem using the same methods that created it in the first place. (pp. 9-10)

In this way, we view learning to unlearn as a productive and generative process that is beneficial in helping us to hone our teaching and grading practices. Just as we were asking our students to trust us to leave feedback that was generative and responsive to their context, we needed to view the feedback we received from students as productive moments of failure. This shift in thinking about failure is an iterative process that requires consistent revision and reflection on established practices.

Through the work of reflecting, revising, and renegotiating contract grading in our unique contexts, we have found that approaching contract grading with an understanding that it is messy, partial, and always unfinished opens us up to enjoy the process as we continue to learn how to best support our students. In addition to providing a theoretical rationale and reflections on each of our contracts, we've also composed a TILT handout located at the end of the chapter for instructors looking to engage in the process of crafting a grading contract. The TILT handout walks instructors through a series of tasks that they should consider when composing a new grading system. Through responding to these questions, instructors can review the contingencies that exist in their own classes and explore how to best accommodate the students engaging in an online space. The handout is meant to offer a reiterative, reflective process that instructors can undertake to begin the transition to contract grading and to reflect and revise their methods at the end of the semester, although the framework can be helpful at any point while teaching a class. The TILT handout does not prescribe one specific way of articulating a contract because we've learned that grading contracts

must be responsive to the particular needs of individual learning environments. Instead, we offer examples of our own grading contracts and the TILT handout as a reflective framework through which to compose your own grading contract.

GRADING CONTRACTS AND EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE, AND ACCESSIBLE PEDAGOGY

Grading contracts can be hard to define because they are highly individualized and unique to specific learning environments. In an attempt to pin down the term, we define contract grading as an approach that distances feedback from grading. As Michelle Cowan writes, "Grading contracts may be used to holistically assess work, assign grades, clearly outline the requirements to make certain grades, motivate students to take personal responsibility for their work, and/or foster democratic social engagement in the classroom" (para. 3, 2020). A grading contract can take a number of different approaches, some of the most common being Inoue's (2014, 2015) labor-based grading contracts, Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow's (2009) guaranteed "B" approach, and Ira Shor's (2009) negotiated contract approach. While an underexplored area in online literacy instruction (OLI), we argue that contract grading offers a better practice for approaching grading in online, any time learning environments by expanding equity, inclusion, and accessibility through a transparent and clear articulation of task expectations for specific letter grades.

Contract grading aligns with a number of OLI principles outlined by the Global Society for Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE) in *Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets* (2019). First, it supports GSOLE Principle 1 (2019), which states, "Online literacy instruction should be universally accessible and inclusive." GSOLE defines inclusion and access as "using multiple teaching and learning formats, engaging students' choices, and welcoming all students in the course." Because grading contracts are adaptable and flexible, instructors can tailor their contracts to *engage student choices* and meet the specific needs of students in specific learning contexts. As Danielewicz and Elbow (2009) write, "Contract grading lends itself to variation. Teachers or programs can easily customize their contracts to fit their particular goals, priorities, and situations" (p. 257) The ability to adapt assessment to meet individual student needs and learning goals through contract grading helps to close that distance and aligns with how Beth Hewett (2015) defines the ethos of universal design principles. The ability to adapt and customize a grading contract can be especially important in online, any time courses where the distance between teacher and student and the delivery of learning may make it challenging to personalize instruction.

A well-designed grading contract can account for the needs of underrepresented and nontraditional learners in online, any time courses. This aligns with CCCC's Postsecondary Principles for Writing 9, which states, "Sound writing instruction provides students with the support necessary to achieve their goals." Principle 9 emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that "students come to postsecondary education with a wide range of writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences." In designing grading contracts, teachers can support individual student development as writers by de-emphasizing knowledge of White mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020), promoting instead instructor feedback that acknowledges the different experiences and literacy levels students may bring to a class. As Inoue (2014) writes,

> We know that students come to us from very different educational systems that do not equally prepare them. We know that we judge the quality of writing in most writing courses by a White, middle-class standard, one not native to poor, the working class, or many students of color. We know that students have no control over any of these factors in their lives, and yet we still say that judging writing quality, particularly for a course grade, is fair. (p. 92)

By shifting the focus from judgements of quality to individual student learning and growth, contract grading can expand equity within online writing assessment. For example, focusing assessment on student growth between drafts, giving substantive weight to student reflections and self-assessments, or using completion scores centers the individual learning of the student and gives agency to the student in the assessment process.

Students come to online learning with a wide range of preparation and experience with digital learning tools, and some space for learning new tools must be built into any course. As Jason Dockter (2016) points out, instructors frequently make generalizations about the students in their class, presuming

> that each student will possess the same knowledge of the role of an online student and the same technological, communication, and reading skills—essentially assuming that all students will react to the various elements of an online course in similar ways. (p. 81)

While online instructors often rely on technology to mediate for distance, they have to be careful to not make assumptions about students' knowledge of learning technologies. GSOLE Principle 1 (2019) emphasizes accessibility and

inclusion related to technology, as follows: "to support the accessible development, design, and teaching of OLCs, all stakeholders must understand the technology use mandated by any particular institution . . . and be able to use it." Instructors should think carefully about the affordances and limitations of the technologies used in the class and what issues may arise throughout the semester, while trying to anticipate how this will impact students' abilities to fully realize the commitments and responsibilities for the class. For instance, grading contracts can support students' variable knowledge and experience related to learning technologies by building policies such as flexible due dates that allow for technology failure as students become familiar with the tools and technologies used in the course.

While the adaptability of contracts makes them attractive, the openness can be daunting and the prospect of getting it "wrong" can feel risky, especially when grades can carry so much weight for students and institutions. As Shor remarks in his 2009 essay on contract grading,

> It's easy to be a bad teacher but hard to be a good one, no matter what kind of pedagogy we use. Good teaching is labor-intensive and immensely rewarding when it "works." Of course, no pedagogy works all the time, and all face student resistances of one kind or another. (p. 6)

Certainly, no teaching practices work all the time—in all contexts and with all students—and this is especially true for online learning. Developing a contract will be an ongoing process; *teachers may feel they did not get it right the first time*, and indeed, may struggle over the grading parameters, the language used to define those parameters, and how to effectively communicate the rationale to students.

This is in line with GSOLE OLI Principle 3 (2019), which states, "Instructors and tutors should commit to regular, iterative processes of course and instructional material design, development, assessment, and revision to ensure that online literacy instruction and student support reflect current effective practices." This is precisely the kind of process our TILT handout supports for instructors developing and revising grading contracts. We emphasize in this piece that ongoing, active revision of both teaching practices and course design and content, in online courses in particular, is important for continuing to meet the needs of diverse distance learners. For new instructors especially, student feedback is integral to revising teaching practices to better accommodate student needs. Each time we use contract grading, our comfort with the methods and practices we use increases, as does our comfort with unlearning, as we become more open to ongoing revision.

COURSE CONTEXT AND LESSON

In this section, we will discuss our processes of developing and revising grading contracts in first-year composition (FYC) courses and professional writing courses. The contracts we use in these different contexts have different parameters and structures that meet the needs of different students, at different universities, and in different stages of their educational pathways. In particular, we will note the differences between how we structured our contracts and how we negotiated with tracking and valuing student work and labor. The goal of this chapter is to help readers determine a process for developing their own contracts, although readers are welcome to adapt the example contracts provided here for their own courses. In the space below, each of us will articulate our classroom contexts and how that context impacted the grading contracts we designed. It's important to recognize the similarities (mostly on the kinds of questions and concerns that we raised as we crafted our contracts) and differences between (especially related to the design and layout of our contracts and the way we negotiated with assigning point-values to assignments) each of our contracts and to interrogate the contingencies present in each of our classrooms that may have dictated the specific rhetorical and structural decisions that we made.

Grading Contracts in an Online, Any Time Technical Writing Course (Gabby)

As an adjunct instructor at a STEM-focused university in New Jersey, I teach an online, any time technical writing course. The course runs for 15 weeks and is a 300-level class; it is offered as a general education course to fulfill a history and humanities 300-level requirement. The course attracts students from across the university, the majority looking to fulfill a general education requirement. I sought to create a contract that was flexible, open, and accommodating. I wanted to provide students with agency in choosing how they approached the course, the assignments, and the deadlines associated with each assignment. To relieve some of the tension associated with online courses—and the physical distance between the students and instructor—I ensured that the grading expectations were transparent from the beginning. Building a trusting learning environment can be especially difficult in online, any time courses since many of us will never see some of our students face-to-face, making it harder to demonstrate our sincerity and authenticity in prioritizing revision and development over product. By clearly outlining the expectations for each letter grade, I endeavored to demystify the grading process and provide students clarity on where their grade stood throughout the semester.

I first introduced the contract to students through the syllabus. To avoid overloading students with too much information on a single document, the syllabus simply stated that students would be graded based on a contract and that they could find it by following a hyperlink. I also stressed that students should reach out to me if there was any confusion about the contract, and alerted students to the discussion board that they'd be asked to complete in which they would be reflecting on the grading contract. To further mitigate anxiety about a new grading system, I composed a preface to the grading contract to explain the rationale and reasoning behind my choice and what I hoped students would gain. I pointed to recurring anxieties that students have expressed about grading as a way to articulate what I saw as the primary benefit of using a grading contract: students' ability to take agency over their grade and a focus on revision and development. Students' awareness of the grading structure and expectations from the beginning of the semester allowed them to manage their workload appropriately according to the grade that they aimed to achieve in the class. This can be especially helpful for nontraditional students or students who are already feeling stress about online learning and succeeding in an online, any time environment, as both can present challenges and a learning curve for students.

The contract outlines the assignment and course expectations that students are expected to complete in order to receive a specific grade. I clearly defined the expectations for each grade to alleviate some anxiety that students may feel about the subjectivity involved in grading. So long as students completed the assignment expectations as outlined, they could expect to receive a completion grade for that assignment. I consistently kept up with grading to ensure that students were aware of their standing in the class throughout the semester. I marked assignments on a complete/incomplete basis and allowed students to revise assignments that did not meet the assignment expectations.

To further encourage transparency while granting students agentive moments to reach their goal grade in the course, I outlined a flexible late policy and clarified the tasks required to receive a passing grade in the preface. For instance, students only need to complete 85 percent of the reading notes (notice and focus discussion boards) to receive an A for that assignment category. This grants students the flexibility to skip a discussion assignment during a week where other stressors and material concerns may be vying for their attention. Through the flexibility offered in the grading contract and the flexible late policy, I provide students with agentive moments throughout the course.

The preface also states that students are expected to complete the assignments in the manner and spirit assigned. Because I hoped to avoid confusing students with vague language and abstract articulations of assessment, what I

wanted to convey with "manner and spirit" was that students understood they should still engage with the material and topics explored in the class while balancing the freedom, flexibility, and creativity afforded by the grading contract. I don't feel I did that adequately by using "manner and spirit," given that the language does not specify, beyond the assignment expectations, how students should engage with the course material. In the future, I might change the wording to express the sentiment expressed in the previous sentence: that students should purposelessly think alongside the material in each module and the material/topics/themes engaged in the course to demonstrate that they are developing as writers and learners. Being specific about thinking alongside the material and the topics in the course provides students a grounded understanding of how they will be assessed. It's important that instructors avoid vague language in their grading contracts. Instead, instructors should aim to provide specific directions that outline the expectations and goals of individual assignments to avoid points of confusion over how students can fulfill the grading contract expectations for individual assignments.

For instance, in an earlier iteration of my grading contract, I neglected to include an explicit segment about the late policy. My intent was to maintain a flexible late policy, and I assumed that students would understand I would not wrongly penalize them for late assignments. However, while I had thought this was clear, a few comments from students suggested that the lack of clarity around the late policy was causing stress and confusion. I also struggled with knowing how to assign credit to students who completed their work consistently late in line with the contract. Thus, in a second iteration of the contract, I revised it to include a 2-point scale for major assignments that allows students to submit late and receive half credit for the assignment and made it clear that minor assignments could be made-up at any point in the semester. Though still not perfect, this version led to fewer student questions around how lates would be handled and assessed according to the grading contract.

In sum, grading contracts offer effective and impactful ways to build trust with your students through transparent grading practices and providing students with agentive moments. Grading contracts also offer a way to ease the cognitive overload students may experience as they learn to navigate digital learning environments. The next grading contract example provides an overview of a grading contract composed for an online, any time first-year composition program. Our classroom environments, students, and learning goals necessitated different approaches to our contracts, a central point we hope to stress in this chapter. In the next section, Michelle focuses on the process of revising a contract through multiple iterations as an example of the process of unlearning and productive failure that is central to using contract grading.

Grading Contracts in Online, Any Time First-Year Writing Classes (Michelle)

As a Writing Program Administrator, I direct an online, any time FYC program. The courses satisfy the general studies writing requirement for students enrolled in online, any time degree programs. The programmatic course goals include introducing students to composing in a range of genres and modalities, engaging in primary and secondary community-based research, and developing a transferable writing process. In addition, our pedagogical priorities include emphasizing process over product, giving students agency in the assessment process through meaningful and heavily weighted reflections on learning, and ensuring all students have opportunities to successfully meet their learning goals.

Students in the courses are predominantly nontraditional students with professional and familial obligations that make accelerated, 7.5-week, online any time courses appealing and convenient. However, the physical distance between instructor and student, accelerated timeframe, and personal and professional demands on students also cause a great deal of cognitive overload. As an online any time course, there is a lot of content students have to navigate on their own while being very new to both college and online learning. To help students focus on the core transferable skills of the course—writing and research in college, with an emphasis on understanding and applying feedback—I led a grading contract pilot with a small cohort of faculty in Fall 2019. The results of the pilot, which included the key finding that habits and dispositions toward grades require unlearning for both teachers and students, are detailed in an article in a special issue of the *Journal of Writing Assessment* (Stuckey et al., 2020).

As a result of the pilot and subsequent iterations of the contract, we learned that the greatest challenges for implementing grading contracts in online, any time courses were clarifying expectations for students in the rationale for the contract and aligning the assessment philosophy with the assessment structures in the learning management system, specifically the built-in rubrics and gradebook. I have come to understand the process of developing and revising the rubrics, in particular, as a moment of productive failure, which I will discuss in greater detail in this section.

The first iterations of the contract were heavily influenced by the Danielewicz and Elbow (2009) model, which is unilateral (meaning it is not negotiated with students) and uses the grade of B as a baseline, with the intention of easing student anxiety by accounting for their engagement with the writing process in a meaningful way. In the initial iteration of the contract for our online program, the purpose was communicated to students as focusing on "**learning rather than grades.**" With this contract, we aimed to de-emphasize student focus on the

points they received, in part by moving from a 1000-point scale to a system in which each assignment was evaluated on a scale of 0–3. This also shifted faculty's focus from judgements of quality that involved looking for "errors" to grading primarily based on completeness.

As much as the contract encouraged students to let go of their focus on grades, the previous experiences they have had with institutionalized learning made it difficult for some students to do that—and certainly it would take more than one 7.5-week class to get them there. A combination of Likert-scale and open-ended responses revealed that—while student reactions to the contract were generally favorable—they were in line with Inman and Powell's (2018) findings in "In the Absence of Grades." That is, many students rely on grades to measure their success or failure in academic contexts, which they often equate with learning, and even their sense of themselves as learners. When those traditional grades are removed from the learning environment, they can feel unmoored from their identities as students. Thus, for some students, a guaranteed "B" did not alleviate stress, and a 3-point scale did not represent the variation in the amount of labor different assignments required. In addition, the online, any time structure posed a challenge for ensuring students actively read and understood the contract.

The pilot also revealed that the language used to define criteria for A and B grades was not always clear to students or teachers. For example, one of the criteria for a B grade was that students "complete the work in a meaningful and substantive manner as outlined by the assignment rubric." Yet, in follow-up surveys, students struggled to understand what constitutes "meaningful and substantive," and indeed, we realized that what that looked like would vary significantly among different students. As part of the B baseline, we had also identified criteria for "exceeding the B" and "falling short of the B." Initial rubric categories included "exceeds expectations" (3), "meets expectations" (2), and "does not meet expectations" (1).

Surveys and focus groups with faculty informed continued revision and refinement of the grading contract, as we learned more about how faculty were interpreting and implementing the contract in their courses. The focus on the B grade was removed, and instead, the contract was structured by defining two categories of assignments: completion-graded and content-graded. What really improved the clarity were the changes made to the rubrics; specifically, the categories were changed to "meets all expectations" (3) "meets most expectations" (2), and "meets few expectations" (1). This move led to a contract that was more focused on task completion and assessed students on whether they had fully responded to the prompt with the distinguishing factor being whether the student met the listed expectations in each category and addressed all required

elements of the assignment. It reduced ambiguity for students and instructors by detailing requirements for the A grade, while eliminating criteria that might force instructors to fall back on subjective judgements of quality of writing. The total score is a holistic assessment that accounts for students' work in relation to all aspects of the assignment. The original and revised versions of the contract can be found in the appendix.

The pilot and subsequent revisions of the contract were important learning experiences for both instructors and administrators, as we let go of certain assumptions and practices and adopted more flexible positions. For teachers, that meant reconsidering—unlearning—old habits and practices and being comfortable taking on new ways of thinking about student writing and grading—and risking discomfort from ambiguity and uncertainty. Instructors expressed that the contract shifted their thinking away from a deficit approach, in which they focused on looking for "errors" and justifying point deductions. For administrators, this experience required coming to terms with productive failure related especially to rubric criteria and understanding that grading contracts, and assessment more broadly, are an ongoing process of reflection and revision. The TILT framework that Gabby and I share later in this chapter is, at least in part, a way to prepare for and act on these moments of productive failure.

Overall, this process has challenged both teachers and administrators in the program to *unlearn* in various ways. The contract itself has challenged faculty to unlearn old grading habits and practices that do not account for the needs and experiences of online students. It has enabled faculty to take a more holistic view of student learning related to writing, and to consider the ideas and processes students engage in without focusing on subjective interpretations of quality. The contract revisions have also created more space for individual students to meet the criteria in their own unique ways without being overly subjected to quality-based criteria.

The process has also shifted faculty and administrators' perspectives on the contract, from seeing it as a policy that was developed and implemented, to understanding assessment methods in much the same ways we do curriculum—as always in process and requiring ongoing revision as we continue to understand students' needs and instructors' practices. With each iteration, the contract better approximates the ethos of the program's pedagogical orientation, better meets the needs of instructors, and increases assessment transparency for students. Contracts are not panaceas, and there is not one perfect solution for the complexities of writing assessment. However, embracing productive failure and understanding the value of ongoing revision and reflection can help faculty learn to design better assessments for online, any time learning contexts.

REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

What works in face-to-face classrooms does not always work in online classes, for a multitude of reasons. With so many different structures and modalities for OLI—from online real-time, online any time, hybrid, 15-week, or 8-week—determining a manageable, sustainable workload for both students and instructors can be challenging. Online students are also not monolithic; they may be first-time college students, nontraditional-aged students, and students with full-time jobs and/or caregiving responsibilities. Contract grading can offer students flexibility in the assignments they choose to focus their attention on and it also can help instructors manage how they prioritize grading and feedback. As the process of teaching well is an ongoing evolution of practice, developing an effective method of contract grading that responds to the particular online context and student population requires continual reflection, revision, and reorientation. Our approach to contracts in online, any time courses, for instance, relies on a few key points:

- Unilateral (non-negotiated) contracts that clearly and transparently outline grading criteria work better in online, any time environments, but still necessitate checkpoints to ensure students read and understand the contract. This could involve, for example, a discussion assignment in which students are required to submit a question or comment about the contract.
- Even with unilateral contracts, there is room for students to have agency in the assessment process, whether through learning reflections and self-assessments or by opportunities to choose their goal grade.
- Treating the grading contract as a foundation for an assessment ecology (Inoue, 2015) that requires alignment with other elements of the course, such as rubrics and late work policies, increases equity, inclusion, and accessibility within the course.

Thus, we are not proposing that readers take the contracts we've developed and use them in their own courses wholesale. Rather, we offer them as examples (which you are welcome to borrow from, as we have from others!) and we encourage online teachers to identify the limitations of their current assessment practices and the particular needs of their student population and consider how those might be negotiated by a grading contract. The TILT handout at the end of this chapter offers one way for instructors to engage in this reflective and reiterative process.

Through this highly individualized assessment practice, instructors can actively respond to the needs of their students. In our experiences, despite some

initial hesitation, students largely perceive contract grading to be one that increases transparency by clearly outlining assessment criteria prior to the start of the semester. Contracts like Gabby's enable students to decide how to manage their workload depending on the grade they want to achieve. In fact, a common thread in her students' reflections about the contract emphasized the flexibility it afforded in terms of deadlines and completing assignments, and thus created a low-stress environment that allowed them to better engage with assignments on their own terms. Programmatic contracts like those Michelle discussed can help create greater consistency and transparency in student assessment across a program, while initiating important conversations that push instructors to examine outdated habits and practices based on error counting. Increasing transparency, encouraging student agency, and expanding inclusivity and accessibility together counter the instrumentalism and transactionality that can creep into online learning, affording more opportunities for instructors to build trust with students. Other chapters in this collection offer further variations, such as Shawn Bowers and Jennifer Smith Daniel's approach to ungrading, which emphasizes moving away from notions of "good writing" in line with White mainstream English and emphasizing iterative process; Kate Pantelides, Samira Grayson, and Erica Stone's Dialogic Assessment Agreement, which negotiates contract terms in conversation with students; or Kevin DePew and Kole Matheson's methods for developing a contract that aligns with educators' pedagogical values (see Chapter 17, this collection).

For teachers, contract grading, or other variations like simplified grading and ungrading, may at first be daunting. Some teachers may struggle with letting go of traditional scales that include plus or minus grades, or may find it challenging to give full completion credit to work that they may view as less developed. As with teaching any new assignment, it can take a semester or two to adjust to a new practice and will require active reflection on attitudes and habits of assessment. Teachers may find that using a particular method just does not work for them or their students because it is too rigid, or too flexible, or just does not meet the needs of the particular class. For example, building in opportunities for resubmission has to be considered in relation to the instructor's teaching load. Allowing multiple re-submissions won't help students if the instructor doesn't have time to re-read them. When you encounter unexpected challenges or your policies don't go as planned, we encourage you to not assume that "contract grading doesn't work for me." As we've tried to impart in this chapter—and as other authors in this collection have demonstrated—contract grading can take many forms and may require experimentation, risk, and revision.

As we've discussed throughout this chapter, using grading contracts involves a constant unlearning process and a rethinking of traditional course policies

and assignments. As unpredictable issues arise throughout the semester, it is up to the instructor to continue to interrogate and revise the grading contract to reflect the class's needs. For instance, aligning the goals of the contract with the grading criteria outlined in the rubrics and making those grading structures work within the constraints of the tools available in your LMS may be challenging and may require multiple iterations. To that end, it is important for instructors to remember that grading contracts can push in ways that may feel uncomfortable in part due to the assessment habits and language biases that we hold; despite this, instructors should continue to revise and reflect on how the grading contract responds to the ebbs and flows of the online course.

CONCLUSION

Contract grading offers an accessible entry point for new instructors and students navigating online learning environments, but also a challenging and exciting path for seasoned online educators to re-envision their assessment practices. The Learning to Unlearn Assessment Revision Activity is a starting point for creating a roadmap to an individualized grading contract. We recommend beginning your journey with a clear understanding of your current assessment practices—what components of it are working for you and your students, and what parts are not? This will require some real honesty about your current approaches as well as your biases around language. We recommend you spend significant time engaging in five tasks: understand your class context; know your student population; describe your class learning goals; gauge your students' experience; and reflect on your experience as a teacher. This will involve significant time and reflection, and you may even need to gather data from your program administrators and current students. You also might consider working with a partner or a small team to engage in this work collaboratively. Being open to self-critique and feedback from others—as well as being willing to examine the habits and biases that shape your current practice—will position you to be successful in this work.

That we can continue to modify and adapt our contracts speaks to the highly individualized nature of grading contracts and the importance of consistent revision, reflection, and interrogation of our assessment practices. Remaining open to the unlearning process and embracing productive failure can help you develop a contract that works for you. This will be an ongoing endeavor, which in many ways counters the infinitely copied course model that undermines online education. Using this activity can help you situate yourself as an online educator, better understand the affordances and constraints of your current online course context, and develop assessment strategies that are more transparent, accessible,

and inclusive and that grant students agency over their learning. The activity can also spark productive dialogue among online educators at a given institution or in a specific department, as it can serve as a starting point for conversations around assessment, online pedagogy, and assumptions and biases about college writing, with the goal of generating even better practices for OWI.

MOVING BETTER PRACTICES ACROSS MODALITIES

We hope our chapter and TILT Handout demonstrate the adaptability and flexibility of grading contracts to a range of teaching and learning needs. The TILT handout is designed to help instructors develop a contract that is suited for their specific modality. Below, we offer some guidance for thinking about maximizing the affordances of different contract methods in different modalities.

- **In-Person, Real-Time Learning:** This modality is well-suited to negotiated contracts in which students are able to participate in setting the terms of the contract through face-to-face conversations and as private conversations during class time or through office hours.
- **Online, Real-Time Learning:** This modality is also well-suited to negotiated contracts in which students are able to participate in setting the terms of the contract through online class conversations or a video call outside of normal class time.
- **Online, Any Time Learning:** Unilateral contracts, the terms of which are not negotiated with students, work better in this modality due to the challenges of real-time discussion. However, individual students could set up a video call for an office hours conversation about the contract.
- **Hybrid Learning:** Depending on the frequency of real-time meetings and the amount of information to be covered during that time, in this modality, instructors could opt for unilateral or negotiated contracts with the option for further discussion during office hours.

TILT HANDOUT: LEARNING TO UNLEARN ASSESSMENT REVISION ACTIVITY

Purpose

The goal of this activity is to help you 1. Understand your current assessment practice, 2. Analyze where and how your current assessment methods fall short of meeting student needs, and 3. Identify what aspects of your approach can be revised for greater clarity, transparency, and equity.

SKILLS

- Openness to self-critique.
- Ability to evaluate your current methods and the habits and biases that inform them.
- Willingness to revise and change your practice.

KNOWLEDGE

This practice will help you to incorporate reflection and revision into your assessment methods. It will help you improve your awareness of the practices you use in order to make deliberate decisions about how best to assess learning in your courses.

Task 1: Understand Class Context

- What is the format of the online course? In-person, real-time; online, any time; hybrid; online, real-time.
- Identify the challenges of this format as it relates to:
  ◦ Building trust with students,
  ◦ Assessing students' work equitably, and
  ◦ Focusing on individual student growth and development.
- Now, flip the process. Identify the affordances of this format as it relates to:
  ◦ Building trust with students,
  ◦ Assessing students' work equitably, and
  ◦ Focusing on individual student growth and development.
- What are the benefits and limitations of the LMS used?
- Identify technologies used in this class that may facilitate assessment (e.g., built-in rubrics).
- Identify technologies used in this class that may pose challenges for assessment (e.g., LMS available grading functions).
- Consider the curriculum for the course.
- What is the purpose of writing in this class, and what kind of assessment and feedback do students need to achieve the learning goals of the class?

Task 2: Know Your Student Population

- What are the demographic characteristics of the students in your online courses?
- Are your students undergraduate or graduate students?

- Are students engaging with writing as a key focus of their degree program, or is this a general education requirement?
- What particular challenges have students struggled with in your course previously?
  - How prepared are students for online learning?
  - What has your institution done to prepare these students for online learning through mandatory or suggested tutorials?
  - What have you asked them about through pre-course surveys, discussion forums, or other means?

Task 3: Describe Class Learning Goals

- What habits of mind do students need to learn or practice in this class according to the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*?
- How can individual student learning be measured through the assignments in this course?
- What assessment methods have been effective for accounting for student learning in past classes?
- On the other hand, what assessment methods have been misaligned with measuring student learning in past classes?
- Given the (mis)alignments noted above, does your current assessment method align with your stated pedagogical goals? In what ways does or does it not?

Task 4: Gauge Student Experience

- What feedback did you receive from students on how they were graded?
- Did students express confusion or concern about the grading method? If so, what did they find confusing?
- Did students say they liked or valued particular aspects of the grading method?
- Did you solicit feedback from students on the assessment method? And if so, what did you learn from that feedback?

Task 5: Reflect on Teacher Experience

- What aspects of assessing student writing do you enjoy the most? Why?
- What do you like least about assessment of student writing? Why?
- Which of the aspects you least enjoy can be eliminated or changed?
- How might they be simplified or changed to be more enjoyable for you as an instructor and meaningful for your students as well?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Contract grading is an approach that distances evaluation and feedback from grading. A grading contract can take a number of different approaches, some of the most common are labor-based grading contracts, the guaranteed "B" approach, and the negotiated contract approach. Labor-based grading contracts assign students a grade based on their labor output in the class. The default grade is a "B," students can achieve a higher grade by doing more work in the course. In the same respect, they can receive a lower grade if they do not submit all of the required work. The guaranteed "B" approach is exactly how it sounds. Students receive a B if they complete all required work in the course. Students can receive a higher grade based on the quality of their work or a lower grade if they do not submit all required work. Finally, the negotiated contract requires instructors to arrive at the requirements for achieving certain grades through class discussions. Instructors can read the following sources for more information on different contract grading models:

- Peter Elbow "Taking Time Out from Grading and Evaluating,"
- Shane Wood "Engaging in Resistant Genres as Antiracist Teacher Response,"
- Asao Inoue "Stories About Grading Contracts, Or How Do I Like the Violence I've Done,"
- Barret John Mandel "Teaching Without Judgement," and
- Michelle Cowan "A Legacy of Contract Grading for Composition."

REFERENCES

Baker-Bell, A. (2020). *Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy*. Routledge.

Bawa, P. (2016). Retention in online courses: Exploring issues and solution: A literature review. *SAGE Open, 6*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015621777

Brannon, L., & Knoblauch, C. H. (1982). On students' rights to their own texts: A model of teacher response. *College Composition and Communication, 33*(2), 157-166.

Conference on College Composition and Communication. (2015). Principles for the postsecondary teaching of writing [Revised]. *National Council of Teachers of English.* https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting

Cowan, M. (2020). A legacy of grading contracts for composition. *Journal of Writing Assessment, 13*(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0j28w67h

Dockter, J. (2016). The problem of teaching presence in transactional theories of distance education. *Computers and Composition, 40*, 73-86.

Danielewicz, J., & Elbow, P. (2009). A unilateral grading contract to improve learning and teaching. *College Composition and Communication*, *61*(2), 244-268.

Elbow, P. (1997). Taking time out from grading and evaluating while working in a

conventional system. *Assessing Writing, 4*(1), 5-27. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1075-2935(97)80003-7

GSOLE Executive Board. (2019, June 13). Online literacy instruction principles and tenets. *Global Society of Online Literacy Educators*. https://gsole.org/oliresources/oliprinciples

Halberstam, J. (2012). Unlearning. *Profession*, 9-16.

Hewett, B. L. (2015). Grounding principles of OWI. In B. L. Hewett & K. E. Depew (Eds.), *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction*, (pp. 33-92). The WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2015.0650.2.01

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. Taylor & Francis Group. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/lib/asulib-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1656118

Inman, J. O., & Powell, R. A. (2018). In the absence of grades. *College Composition and Communication, 70*(1), 30-56.

Inoue, A. B. (2014). A grade-less writing course that focuses on labor and assessing. In D. Teague & R. Lunsford (Eds.), *First-year composition: From theory to practice* (pp. 71-110). Parlor Press.

Inoue, A. B. (2015). *Antiracist writing assessment ecologies: Teaching and assessing writing for a socially just future.* The WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2015.0698

Inoue, A. B. (2019). Classroom writing assessment as an antiracist practice: Confronting white supremacy in the judgments of language. *Pedagogy 19*(3), 373-404. https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/733095

Inoue, A. B. (2020). Stories about grading contracts, or how do I like through the violence I've done? *Journal of Writing Assessment, 13*(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3zw9h7p9

Mandel, B. J. (1973). Teaching without judging. *College English, 34*(5), 623-633.

Shor, I. (2009). Critical pedagogy is too big to fail. *Journal of Basic Writing, 28*(2), 6-27.

Stuckey, M. A., Erdem, E., & Waggoner, Z. (2020). Rebuilding habits: Assessing the impact of a hybrid learning contract in online first-year composition courses. *Journal of Writing Assessment, 13*(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9sp0g53j

Wood, S. (2020). Engaging in resistant genres as antiracist teacher response. *Journal of Writing Assessment, 13*(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2c45c0gf

APPENDIX 1: GRADING CONTRACT FOR ENG 352 FALL 2021

Adapted from Asao Inoue's Labor-Based Grading Contract and Michelle Stuckey's Grading Contract

Grading is considered to be a traditional, standardized academic practice at most institutions. Most of us were first introduced to letter grades around middle school; maybe some of us felt they pushed us to be our best, maybe some of us felt they were rigid and limiting, or maybe some of us barely paid attention to them, but regardless, we all have had an experience involving grading. This semester, I'd

like to turn away from the traditional grading model and its emphasis on a single standard and turn towards what I and others consider to be a more equitable assessment practice—grading contracts (Elbow, 1987; Inoue, 2014; Mandel, 1973).

A grading contract provides a clearly outlined understanding of how a student can expect to be assessed throughout the semester. This grading contract will outline the assignments that students will be expected to complete along with other expectations of the course in a clearly defined manner. I decided to utilize a grading contract this semester because I believe that it offers a way for students to take agency over the course and their grades. Traditional grading systems tend to result in students who are afraid to take risks out of fear of receiving a lower grade; moreover, they create stressful learning environments and foster competition among students.

Instead, this semester, your grade for ENG352 will be evaluated based on a grading contract that focuses on meeting explicitly defined expectations for the course. It is my hope that you will find that a grading contract offers you a clear understanding of your grade at any point in the semester. This does not mean that you will not be assessed throughout the semester; you are still expected to submit all assignments in the manner and spirit that they are assigned. You are also expected to adhere to outlined participation expectations. While you will receive feedback on your assignments, you will not receive a grade based on that feedback (just a completion mark); rather your grade will be based on your ability to fulfill the course and assignment expectations outlined below. We will use a discussion board to discuss any changes that students may wish to make to the contract. You should leave any thoughts/comments that you have about the grading contract there. Students should post a response on the discussion board by the second week of class. Take some time to look over the expectations of the course. Do any seem unfair or unreasonable? Should we raise some of the expectations? Consider your own experience with grades; how did/do grades impact your learning in the classroom? Consider the traditional grading model, and interrogate whether students are all held to an equitable standard.

The course expectations are outlined in *Table 18.1*. **Further,** assignments are expected to . . .

- Be turned in on time within the 48-hour deadline exempting extensions (students may be granted one a semester).
- Fulfill all assignment requirements as outlined in the discussion board descriptions on and on each of the major assignments.
- Engage with the course material and feedback provided by the instructor.
- Demonstrate thoughtful reflection and a deep interrogation of technical and professional writing practices.

Table 18.1. Grading Distribution for ENG352 Contract

Grade:	A Grade	B Grade	C Grade	D + Below Grade
Expecta-tions:	**6 Major Projects **All reflective questions posed at the end of major projects **85% (12) of "in-formal" discussion boards + minor assignments **85% (7) of notice and focus discussion boards **Collaboratively working with peers and ensuring that all peer and group work is submitted by the deadline. This includes (all) reflection discus-sion boards and crafting an email assignment as well as peer review for the revised propos-al assignment **Attend 1 office hour sessions	**6 Major Projects – one week late **4 reflective questions posed at the end of major projects **75% (10) of "in-formal" discussion boards + minor assignments **75% (6) of notice and focus discussion boards **Collaboratively working with peers and ensuring that all peer and group work is submitted by the deadline. This includes completing (4) reflection discus-sion boards and crafting an email assignment as well as peer review for the revised propos-al assignment **Attend 1 office hour session	**6 Major Projects – two weeks late **2 reflective questions posed at the end of major projects **65% (9) of "in-formal" discussion boards + minor assignments **65% (5) of notice and focus discussion boards **Collaboratively working with peers and ensuring that all peer and group work is submitted by the deadline. This includes completing (3) reflection discus-sion boards and crafting an email assignment as well as peer review for the revised propos-al assignment **Attend 0 office hour sessions	**Missing a Major Project(s) – 4 or more projects are two weeks late **0 reflective questions posed at the end of major projects **Less than 65% of "informal" dis-cussion boards + minor assignments ** Less than 65% of notice and focus discussion boards **Does not collaboratively work with peers or submit peer and group work by the deadline **Attend 0 office hour sessions

Ways to move up a grade or makeup missing work, such as not attending an office hour session, not completing 90 percent of discussion boards, or not completing 85 percent of notice and focus discussion boards can possibly include:

- Attending more than one office hour sessions.
- Completing more than 85 percent of discussion board assignments or notice and focus assignments.
- Revising a major project aside from the proposal.
- Exceptional (or mediocre) work.
- Students are expected to complete all assignments according to the expectations outlined in the assignment. Consistently submitting work

that does not meet the assignment expectations or does not engage with the course material and feedback provided by the instructor and peers may result in a letter grade deduction at the instructor's discretion.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. By staying in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it. I (Gabriella) also agree to abide by the contract and administer it fairly and equitably.

APPENDIX 2: GRADING CONTRACT FOR CISA WRITERS' STUDIO FALL 2019

LEARNING CONTRACT RATIONALE

The Writers' Studio first-year composition courses aim to help you develop a sense of yourself as a composer, writer, reader, thinker, and learner. To accomplish this, we guide you in identifying and practicing the skills and habits you will need to be a successful composer and, more broadly, a successful learner in college, in your profession, in your community, and in your personal life. We want to help you realize that successful **rhetorical** communicators have developed a clear composing process made up of specific practices and habits. As a student in our classes, you will develop your own processes to draw on whenever you are faced with a new communication situation. We will also help you learn which of your own composing habits are strengths that you can continue to hone, and which you must work harder to improve.

Our composition classes are communities of composers and writers. Social and collaborative composing activities maximize student opportunities to engage with the concepts, habits, and processes foundational to first-year composition through the Writers' Studio. Part of this learning contract involves **committing to the community**—engaging in authentic and meaningful conversations about composing with your classmates, instructor, and writing mentor. To be an engaged and committed member of your Writers' Studio community, you also need to responsibly complete assignments and submit them in a timely manner. Your classmates need you to fully participate—their learning also depends to some extent on your learning.

We know that students find their way to first-year composition in the Writers' Studio through diverse life experiences and educational goals. We want to do our best to ensure you succeed in our courses by helping you navigate these challenges. We know every student can not only pass but also maximize your potential as writers and composers. We understand that many of you have other commitments, life goals, and motivations, and we want all students to have a path to success in our courses.

To that end, we employ the following contract, which focuses on **learning rather than grades.** We want you to think less about your grades and more about your composing. We want you to work thoughtfully, take risks, and pursue ideas that you find compelling, without being overly distracted by your final course grade. You are guaranteed a B in the course if you complete the following activities and meet the following guidelines.

With this contract, we hope to move the focus from grades to composing. We hope you see your instructor and writing mentor as coaches who can offer support, feedback, and guidance—and who push you to excel. If you read, listen to, and act on their feedback and engage in conversation with them, you will grow as a composer while learning the valuable tool of self-assessment.

Earning a B Grade

We believe that in order for you to grow as a composer and writer, you need to develop important skills and habits through the process of developing the stages of a composing project. Completing all required assignments will help you develop these habits while meeting the course learning outcomes. Thus, if you complete the work in this class according to the criteria outlined below, **you will receive a B in the course.**

To meet the B requirement for any of the work in this course, you must do the following:

- Submit the work on time.
- Complete the work in a **meaningful and substantive manner as outlined by the assignment rubric.**
- Meet all expectations and requirements for the given assignment.
- Demonstrate **openness** to revision and consideration of previous feedback.

The majority of your work will be given a **completion grade;** that is, the grade book will reflect whether you completed the assignment in a **meaningful and substantive manner** while meeting the specific requirements of the assignment. We have provided rubrics to clarify what we mean by **meaningful and substantive** for all the major assignments.

More important than any grade you receive is your instructor and/or peer mentor's feedback. We want you to prioritize that feedback over a grade you have been assigned and hope you focus on building a conversation with the members of your composing community about your composing rather than about any specific grade.

If you engage seriously with the process approach to work in this class, you will leave with the knowledge, skills, habits, and practices you need for composing in college and beyond.

Exceeding the B Grade

We believe that improving as a composer takes practice, and so the more practice you have, the more you will improve. We acknowledge and reward those efforts to improve. You have the opportunity to exceed the B grade on every assignment. Your revision analyses and portfolio reflections also offer opportunities to argue and offer evidence for how you exceeded expectations. To achieve an "A" in this class, you must

- Consistently exceed expectations on assignments, such as making connections to the previous and upcoming assignments.
- Demonstrate deep learning, such as the ability to transfer essential skills and habits, in portfolio reflections.
- Provide evidence of substantial revision on final drafts of all major projects (Project 1, Project 2, and the Final Portfolio).

Falling Short of the B Grade

Missing assignments, unsatisfactory assignments, and turning final projects in late will reduce your grade.

Assessment and Grading

For every assignment, you will receive a score on a scale of 0–3:

- 0 = not submitted.
- 1 = submitted but does not meet expectations for a B.
- 2 = meets expectations for a B.
- 3 = exceeds expectations for a B.

Assignments will be weighted differently according to the amount of time and effort required. So, although you will receive a 0–3 score for all assignments, a final project will be weighted more than a discussion board post, for example. Please see the breakdown of the assignment weighting on the course syllabus.

Please also note that Canvas weighting always shows the total as a percentage. **In this scale from 0–3, a 66% is a B grade.**

APPENDIX 3: GRADING CONTRACT FOR CISA WRITERS' STUDIO FALL 2021

Rationale

The Writers' Studio composition courses are communities of composers and writers. To become stronger writers and composers, students need feedback.

That is why, in the Writers' Studio, we emphasize social and collaborative composing activities. Students need many opportunities to practice the concepts, habits, and processes foundational to first-year composition through interactions with peers, instructors, and writing mentors. Part of this learning contract involves **committing to the community**: engaging in authentic and meaningful conversations about composing with your classmates, instructor, and writing mentor. To be an engaged and committed member of your Writers' Studio community, you also need to responsibly complete assignments and submit them in a timely manner. Your classmates need you to fully participate—their learning also depends to some extent on your learning.

We know that students find their way to first-year composition in the Writers' Studio through diverse life experiences and educational goals. We want to do our best to ensure you succeed in this class by helping you navigate these life and educational challenges. We believe all of you can not only pass this class but also maximize your potential as writers and composers. We understand that many of you have other commitments, life goals, and motivations, and we want all students to have a path to success in our courses.

To help all students find a path to success in our courses, we use the following contract to assess student learning. Our approach focuses on **learning rather than grades**. We ask you to think less about your grades and more about your composing and ideas. We encourage you to work thoughtfully, take cognitive risks, and pursue ideas that you find compelling, without being overly distracted by your course grade.

With this contract, we hope to move the focus from grades to composing. We hope you see your instructor and writing mentor as coaches who can offer support, feedback, and guidance—and who encourage you to excel. If you read, listen to, and act on their feedback and engage in conversation with them, you will grow as a composer while learning the valuable tool of self-assessment.

Course Grading

In order for you to grow as a composer and writer, you need to develop important skills and habits. Completing all required assignments will help you practice these skills and habits while meeting the course goals.

For every assignment, you can earn up to 3 points, defined as follows:

- 3 = meets all requirements.
- 2 = meets most requirements.
- 1 = submitted but meets few requirements.
- 0 = not submitted or does not meet any requirements.

This class has two categories of assignments: those that are assessed on completion and those that are assessed on content.

Completion-Assessed Assignments

In this class, you will complete a number of "invention assignments," which are low-stakes assignments that help you develop your ideas for the larger projects you work on. (Details about what assignments count as invention work can be found on the syllabus.) Invention assignments in this class are assessed on completion. That is, for these assignments, you will earn a "3" if you:

- submit the assignment on time.
- complete all components for the assignment.
- demonstrate consideration of previous feedback, where applicable.

Content-Evaluated Assignments

Some assignments in this class require more time and effort; this includes your three reflections and two majors projects. To earn a "3" on these assignments, in addition to meeting the criteria above, you will also be assessed on the content of each assignment. That is, your writing will be evaluated on whether you have met the requirements listed on the rubric for the assignment.

Focus on Feedback

More important than any grade or score is the feedback you receive from your instructor, writing mentor, and peers. We want you to prioritize that feedback over any score you have been assigned. We hope you focus on building a conversation with the members of your class community about your composing rather than about any specific grade. Remember, the focus is on your learning.

If you engage seriously with the process approach to work in this course, you will leave with the knowledge, skills, habits, and practices you need for composing in college and beyond.

Assignment Weighting

Assignments will be weighted differently according to the amount of time and effort required. So, a reflection or revised draft will be weighted more than a discussion post, for example. Please see the breakdown of the assignment weighting on the course syllabus.

Please also note that Canvas weighting always shows the total as a percentage. **In this scale from 0 to 3, a score of 2/3 (67%) is the equivalent of a B grade (not a D!).**