

# APPENDIX A: ENGLISH 160W'S GRADING CONTRACT

## OUR GRADING CONTRACT FOR ENGL 160W-24

(Adapted from Peter Elbow's contract; see Elbow, 1997; Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009.)

**ASAO B. INOUE**

Dear Class:

In most learning situations in life outside of school, grades are never given. The learning that occurs in Kung Fu dojos, or cooking, dance, or yoga studios do not use any grading. Why? In these "studio" cases, it seems meaningless to give students grades, and yet without any grades, those students get better at yoga, dance, and cooking. These studio learning situations should prompt us to ask some questions: Why are grades meaningless in those settings but seem so important in a school setting? How do grades affect learning in classrooms? What social dynamics does the presence of grades create? In both situations, instructors provide students/participants with evaluative feedback from time to time, pointing out where, say, they've done well and where the instructor suggests improvement. In the studio situation, many students would help each other, even rely on each other for feedback.

Using conventional grading structures to compute course grades often lead students to think more about their grade than about their writing or learning; to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what they really want to learn, or how they want to communicate something to someone for some purpose. Additionally, conventional grading may cause you to be reluctant to take risks with your writing or ideas. It doesn't allow you to fail at writing, which many suggest is a primary way in which people learn from their practices. Sometimes grades even lead to the feeling that you are working *against* your teacher, or that you cannot make a mistake, or that you have to hide part of yourself from your teacher and peers. And the psychological research in education, over thirty years of it, has shown over and over that grades not only do not help students learn but they actually harm your learning, keep you from learning. For these reasons, I am incorporating a contract for grading in our class, which avoids the uses of grades and numbers.

I offer this first draft of a contract that focuses on the responsibilities we'll assume, not the things to which someone else (usually the teacher) will hold

you accountable. The pedagogical shift I'm suggesting is in part a cultural one. Therefore, we will try to *approximate* the evaluative conditions of a home studio course. That is, we will try to create a culture of support, or rather a *community of compassion*, a group of people who genuinely care about the wellbeing of each other—and part of that caring, that compassion, is acting, doing things for each other. It turns out, this also helps you learn. The best way to learn is to teach others. So we will function as collaborators, allies, as fellow-travelers with various skills, abilities, experiences, and talents that we offer the group, rather than adversaries working against each other for grades or approval by teachers.

So if you're looking to game the system, and do the least amount of work to get the highest possible course grade, this is NOT the class for you. You'll only be frustrated, even angry. Things will seem unfair at times. But if you wish to learn and improve yourself as a writer and reader, are willing to do a lot of work to reach those goals, accept the idea that your labor will be rewarded and not the quality of your work (although we will discuss quality and it is important to your success, but not important to your course grade), then this is the class for you.

Finally, taking grades out of the class, I hope will allow you freedom to take risks and really work hard. Do not be afraid to take risks in your writing and work. Failing or miss the mark is healthy for learners. Good, deep, important learning often happens because of failure—so it's really not failure at all. Failure really only happens in our class when you do not do the work, or do not labor in the ways we ask of you. Most importantly, what looks like failure in writing can show us our weaknesses, misunderstandings, and opportunities for growing and changing. Furthermore, since I won't grade anything, this allows you the chance to rely more authentically on your colleagues and your own assessment and revision advice. This will help you build strategies of self-assessment that function apart from a teacher's approval. I want you to learn to listen carefully to colleagues' differing judgments, assess the worth of those judgments for your work and its purposes, express why one idea is more workable and better than others, and most importantly, make informed, careful decisions in your writing that you can explain to others.

**The default grade, then, for the course is a “B.”** In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you work through the processes we establish and the work we assign ourselves during the semester, then you'll get a “B.” If you miss class, turn in assignments late, or forget to do assignments, etc., your grade will be lower.

### “B” Grades

You are guaranteed a course grade of “B” if you meet all of the following conditions. Please note that in each item below, there are questions that I cannot

decide alone, particularly questions of definition. The results/conclusions of our discussions will be put into this contract in the places below.

- 1. Attendance/Participation.** You agree to attend and fully participate in at least 87.5% of our scheduled class sessions and their activities and assignments, which means **you may miss (for whatever reason) 4 class sessions.** For our class, attendance should equate to participation, so we need to figure out together what “participation” means and when does someone not get credit for it?

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**NOTE:** Assignments not turned in because of an absence, either ones assigned on the schedule or ones assigned on earlier days in class, will be late, missed, or ignored (depending on when you turn it in finally, see the guidelines #4, #5, and #6 below).

Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, band, etc.) will not count against you, as stipulated by university policy, as long as the student has FIRST provided written documentation in the first two weeks of the semester of all absences. This same policy applies to students who have mandatory military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.). Again, the student must provide written documentation, stating the days he/she will be absent. This will allow us to determine how he/she will meet assignments and our contract, despite being absent.

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- 2. Lateness.** You each agree to come on time or early to class. Five minutes past our start time is considered late. Walking into class late a few times in a semester is understandable, but when does lateness become a problem (for the class as a whole and/or for the individual)? As a rule of thumb, **coming in late 4 or more times in a semester will constitute an absence.**
  - 3. Sharing and Collaboration.** You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups. This may be the easiest of all our course expectations to figure out, but we should have some discussions on what we expect from each other.
  - 4. Late Assignments.** You will turn in properly and on time all essays, assessments, evaluations, portfolio evaluations, reflections, and other assignments. Because your colleagues in class depend on you to get your work done on time so that they can do theirs on time, all late assignments are just as bad as missed assignments. However, depending on what we agree to in the first week or two of the semester, you may turn in a late assignment or two (see the “Breakdown” table below). In order for an assignment to be considered a **“late assignment,” it STILL must be turned in, at least two days (48 hours) after its initial due date, and it should be complete and meet all the assignment’s requirements** (e.g., if an essay was due on Friday,

Sept 20 at noon, a late essay must be turned in by noon on Sunday, Sept 22). Please note that a late assignment may be due on a day when our class is not scheduled to meet.

5. **Missed Assignments.** A missed assignment is NOT one not turned in; it is one that has missed the guidelines for a late assignment somehow but is still complete and turned in at some point in the semester (e.g., after the 48 hours). Most missed assignments are those turned in after the 48-hour late turn-in period (see #4 above). **In order to meet our contract for a “B” grade, you cannot have any “missed assignments.”** Please note that assignments *not turned in at all* are considered “Ignored Assignments” (see #6 below). A missed assignment is usually one turned in after the 48 hour “late” assignment deadline.
6. **Ignored Assignments.** Any assignments not done period, or “ignored,” for whatever reasons, are put in this category. One of these in the grade book means an automatic “D.” Two acquired gives you an “F.” Additionally, if any of the essays or portfolios become ignored assignments, it constitutes an automatic failure of the course.
7. **All Work and writing** needs to meet the following conditions:
  - **Complete and On Time.** You agree to turn in on time and in the appropriate manner complete essays, writing, or assessments that meet all of our agreed upon expectations. (See #4 above for details on late assignments). This means that assignments are not just done but done in the spirit and manner asked. They must meet the expectations given in class or on handouts.
  - **Revisions.** When the job is to revise your thinking and work, you will reshape, extend, complicate, or substantially clarify your ideas—or relate your ideas to new things. You won’t just correct, edit, or touch up. Revisions must somehow respond to or consider seriously your colleagues’ (or teacher’s) assessments in order to be revisions.
  - **Copy Editing.** When the job is for the final publication of a draft, your work must be well copy edited—that is, free from most mistakes in spelling and grammar. It’s fine to get help in copy editing. (Copy editing doesn’t count on drafts before the final draft or portfolio.)

## “A” Grades

All grades in this course depend upon how much *labor* you do. If you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit asked, and meet the guidelines in this contract, specifically the “Break-Down” section at the end of this contract, then you get a “B” course grade. Grades of “A,” however, depend on doing advanced projects for both Project 1 and 2, which equates to about twice the work

or length of the final project documents. Thus you earn a B if you put in good time and effort, do all the work, and do both projects in an acceptable fashion. But you earn an “A” if you do more work in the two projects—that is, do more in-depth projects (described on the Project handout and in the Syllabus).

While you do not have to worry about anyone’s judgments or standards of excellence to meet the grading contract, you are obligated to listen carefully to and address your colleagues’ and my concerns in all your work of the class. This means that when you receive feedback you’ll use that feedback to help you continually improve your writing. So while others’ judgments of your work is not important to your course grade, it is important to your learning and development.

### Grades Lower Than B

I hope no one will aim for lower grades. The quickest way to slide to a “C,” “D,” or “F” is to miss classes, not turn in things on time, turn in sloppy or rushed work, or show up without assignments. This much is nonnegotiable: you are not eligible for a grade of “B” unless you have attended at least 86% of the class sessions (see also #1 above), and meet the guidelines above. And you can’t just turn in all the late work at the end of the semester. If you are missing classes and get behind in work, please stay in touch with me about your chances of passing the course.

### Break-Down

Below is a table that shows the main components that affect your successful compliance with our contract.

**Table 1. The break-down of labor that calculates your final course grade**

	# of Absences	# of Late Assigns.	# of Missed Assigns.	# of Ignored Assigns.
<b>A</b>	4 or less	5*	0	0
<b>B</b>	4 or less	5*	0	0
<b>C</b>	5	6	1	0
<b>D</b>	6	7	2	1
<b>F</b>	7	8 or more	2	2 or more

\*For those who were able to meet the contract’s original guidelines (i.e., three or fewer late assignments) will receive extra consideration during the final conferences. This means a student who has three or fewer late assignments and has

met the contract in all other ways may get the benefit of the doubt should his/her portfolio not fully meet the requirements for an “A” contract.

**Plea.** I (Asao), as the administrator of our contract, will decide in consultation with the student whether a plea is warranted in any case. The student must come to the teacher (Asao Inoue) as soon as possible, usually before the student is unable to meet the contract (before breaching the contract), in order that he/she and the teacher can make fair and equitable arrangements, ones that will be fair and equitable to all in the class and still meet the university’s regulations on attendance, conduct, and workload in classes. **You may use a plea for any reason, but only once in the semester.** Please keep in mind that the contract is a public, social contract, one agreed upon through group discussion and negotiation, so my job is to make sure that whatever agreement we come to about a plea will not be unfair to others in class. The plea is NOT an “out clause” for anyone who happens to not fulfill the contract in some way; it is for rare and unusual circumstances out of the control of the student.

By staying in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it. I also agree to abide by the contract, and administer it fairly and equitably (Asao).