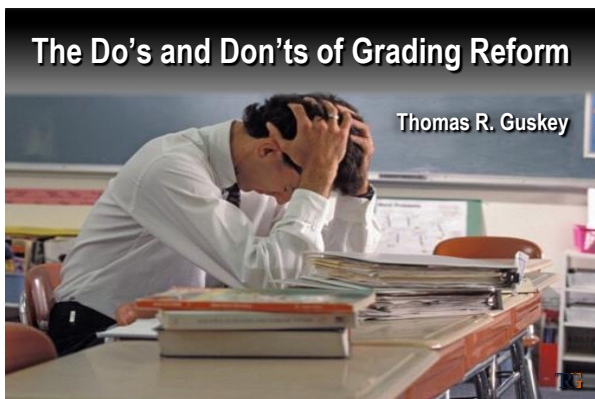


# The Do's and Don'ts of Grading Reform

Thomas R. Guskey



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For help or additional information:

**Thomas R. Guskey**

Professor Emeritus  
University of Kentucky



tguskey.com



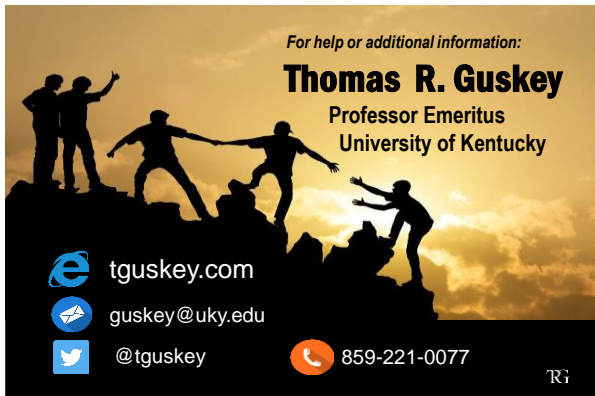
guskey@uky.edu



@tguskey



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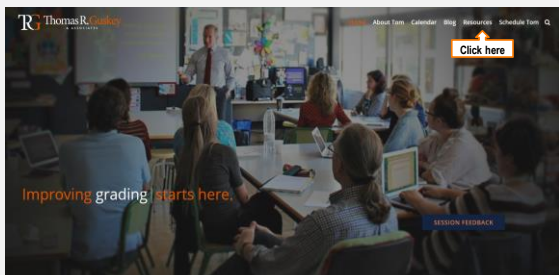
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For copies of the slides, go to: [www.tguskey.com](http://www.tguskey.com)



Improving grading starts here.

SESSION FEEDBACK

Password: **grading**



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**Important Questions**

1. Why do we assign grades to students' work and use report cards?
2. What evidence should be used in determining students' grades?  
(For example, major exams, compositions, formative assessments, homework, class participation, etc. )

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## Surveys of educators identify **six purposes of grading**

1. Communicate achievement status to **parents**
2. Provide information to **students** for self-evaluation
3. **Select, identify, or group** students for instruction
4. Provide **incentives** for students
5. **Evaluate** the effectiveness of instructional programs
6. Document students' **effort or responsibility**

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## Grading Elements

- |                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ✓ Major exams or compositions     | ✓ Oral presentations         |
| ✓ Formative assessments           | ✓ Homework completion        |
| ✓ Reports or projects             | ✓ Homework quality           |
| ✓ Student portfolios              | ✓ Class participation        |
| ✓ Exhibits of students' work      | ✓ Work habits and neatness   |
| ✓ Laboratory projects             | ✓ Effort                     |
| ✓ Students' notebooks or journals | ✓ Class attendance           |
| ✓ Classroom observations          | ✓ Punctuality of assignments |
|                                   | ✓ Class behavior or attitude |
|                                   | ✓ Progress made              |

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2. **Don't** believe your experience was **best practice!**

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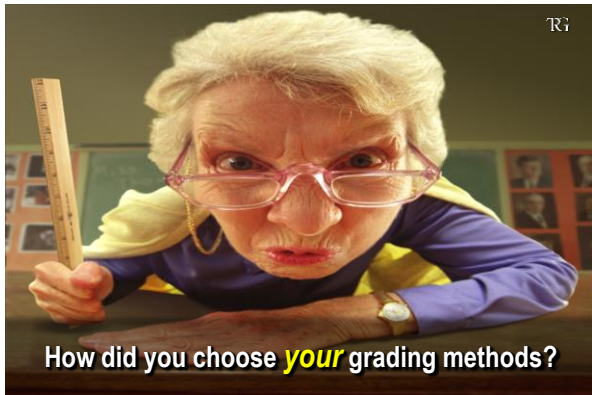
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How did you choose **your** grading methods?

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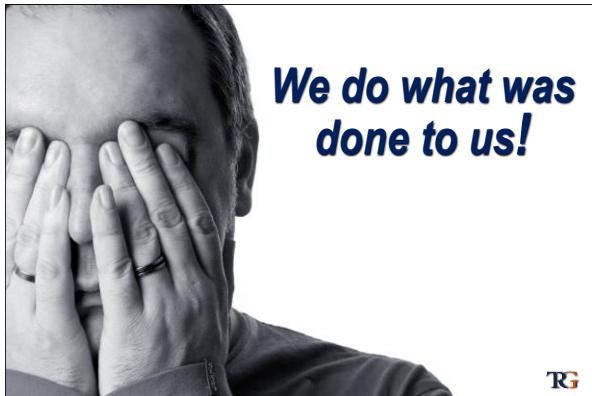
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**We do what was  
done to us!**

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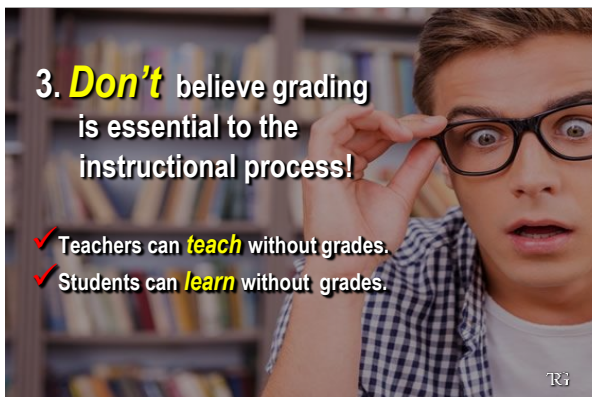
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3. **Don't** believe grading  
is essential to the  
instructional process!

- ✓ Teachers can **teach** without grades.
- ✓ Students can **learn** without grades.

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But checking **is** essential!

- ✓ Checking is **Diagnostic**  
- Teacher is an **Advocate**
- ✓ Grading is **Evaluative**  
- Teacher is a **Judge**

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4. **Do** know that labels are important to parents!

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### Levels of Student Performance Labels

**1. Levels of Understanding / Quality**

Modest	Beginning	Novice	Unsatisfactory
Intermediate	Progressing	Apprentice	Needs Improvement
Proficient	Adequate	Proficient	Satisfactory
Superior	Exemplary	Distinguished	Outstanding

**2. Levels of Mastery / Proficiency**

Below Basic	Below Standard	Pre-Emergent	Incomplete
Basic	Approaching Standard	Emerging	Limited
Proficient	Meets Standard	Acquiring	Partial
Advanced	Exceeds Standard	Extending	Thorough

**3. Frequency of Display**

Rarely	Never
Occasionally	Seldom
Frequently	Usually
Consistently	Always

**4. Degree of Effectiveness**

Ineffective	Poor
Moderately Effective	Acceptable
Highly Effective	Excellent

**5. Evidence of Accomplishment**

Little or No Evidence
Partial Evidence
Sufficient Evidence
Extensive Evidence

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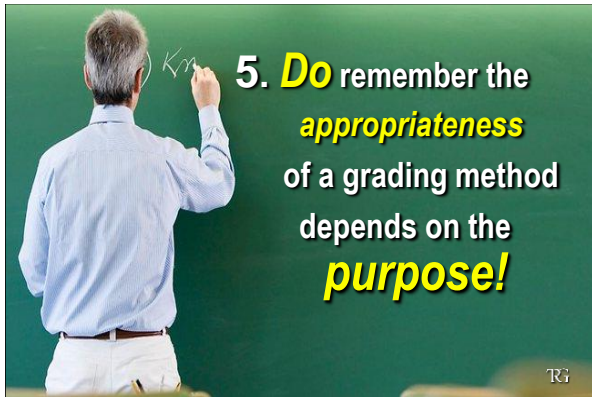
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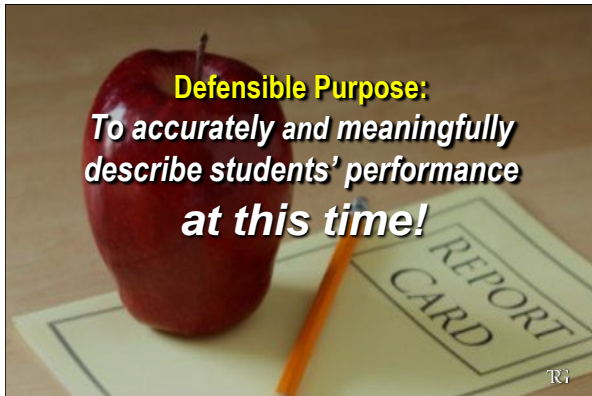
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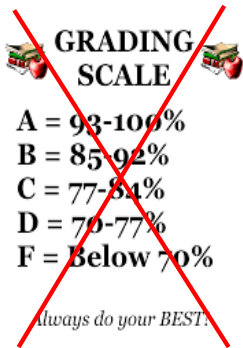
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6. *Don't* use  
percentage  
grades!



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## Letter Grades

(*Labels* attached to *categories* of performance)

### → Positives:

1. Describe the adequacy of performance
2. Generally understood

### → Shortcomings:

1. Require integration of diverse information
2. Arbitrary cut-offs
3. Easily misinterpreted



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## Percentage Grades?

(*Numbers* attached to *calculations*)

### → Questionable Positives (???):

1. Provide finer discrimination
2. Increase variation in grades

### → Shortcomings:

1. Require integration of diverse information
2. Increase the number of arbitrary cut-offs
3. Accentuate the influence of subjectivity



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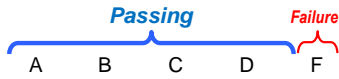
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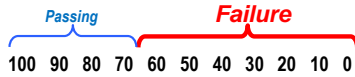
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Typical Letter Grading Scale:



Percentage Grading Scale:



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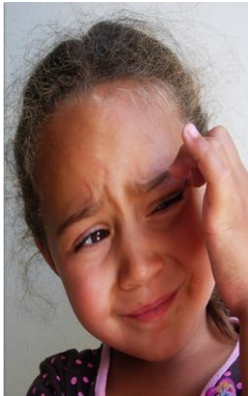
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Percentages  
applied to  
performance are  
often *inaccurate!*

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Does 80%  
mean mastery?



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It depends on the **standard!**

Is **80%** sufficient for:

- ✓ Crossing the street safely?
- ✓ Being honest?
- ✓ Landing a plane safely?
- ✓ Using machinery in shop?
- ✓ Football pass completions
- ✓ Scoring in basketball?
- ✓ Getting a hit in baseball?



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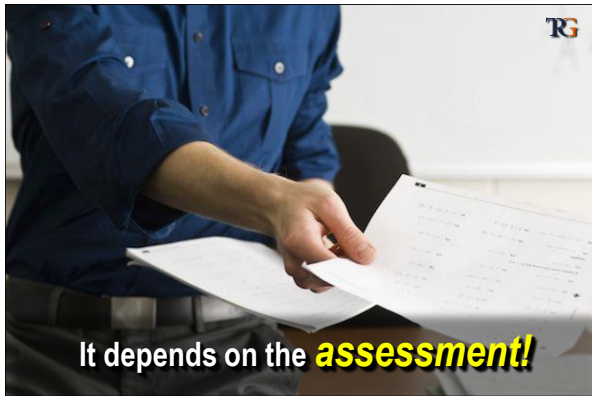
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It depends on the **assessment!**



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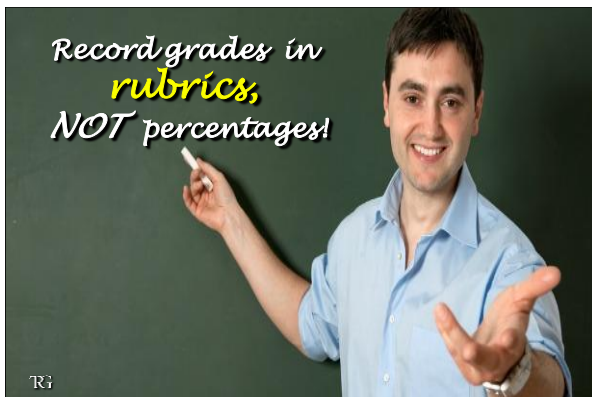
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Record grades in  
**rubrics,**  
**NOT** percentages!



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# Standards-Based

(Labels attached to *categories* of performance)

## → Positives:

1. Offers a clear description of achievement
2. Useful for diagnosis and prescription

## → Shortcomings:

1. Involves extra work for teachers
2. May not be supported by gradebooks

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# Narratives

(Written *descriptions* of performance)

## → Positives:

1. Offer a clear description of achievement
2. Useful for diagnosis and prescription

## → Shortcomings:

1. Time-consuming for teachers to develop
2. May not communicate the adequacy of progress
3. Comments often become standardized

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Combine methods to enhance  
*communicative value!*

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Grades with comments are **better** than grades alone!

**Grade Standard Comment**

- A *Excellent! Keep it up.*
- B *Good work. Keep at it.*
- C *Perhaps try to do still better?*
- D *Let's bring this up.*
- F *Let's raise this grade!*

From: Page, E. B. (1958). Teacher comments and student performance: A seventy-four classroom experiment in school motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 49, 172-181.



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7. **Do** base grades on **learning criteria**; never on “normative” criteria.



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**Results from Norm-Based Grading**  
(Grading “On the Curve”)

1. Tells nothing about learning
2. Makes learning highly competitive.
3. Discourages student collaboration.
4. Diminishes relationships between students and teachers.



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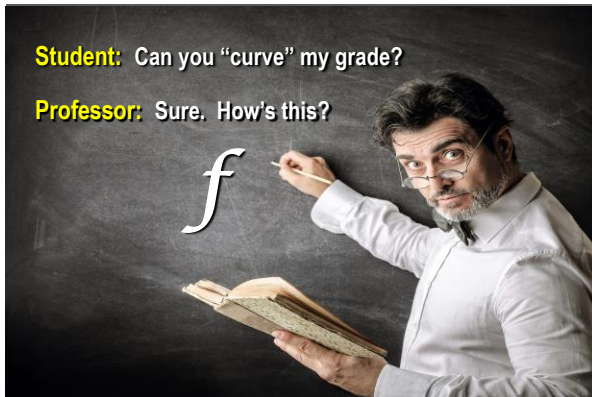
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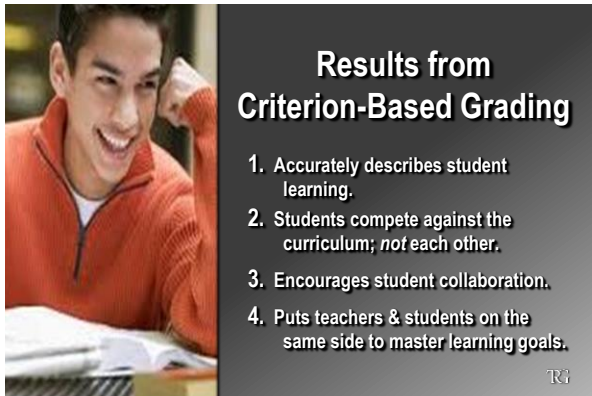
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## State of College Admission Survey (2018)

National Association for College Admission Counseling

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TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in College Prep Courses	231	79.2%	13.0%	6.9%	0.9%
Grades in All Courses	229	60.3	31.0	8.7	—
Strength of Curriculum	231	60.2	26.8	10.0	3.0
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	228	55.7	32.5	7.9	3.9
Essay or Writing Sample	231	22.1	39.0	21.6	17.3
Counselor Recommendation	231	17.3	42.4	27.3	13.0
Student's Demonstrated Interest	231	16.9	33.3	26.8	22.9
Teacher Recommendation	230	15.2	43.5	27.8	13.5
Class Rank	228	14.0	37.7	32.0	16.2
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	227	7.0	35.2	32.6	25.1
Portfolio	229	6.6	10.0	30.6	52.8
Extracurricular Activities	231	5.6	43.3	34.6	16.5
SAT II Scores	226	5.3	8.4	23.0	63.3
Interview	229	3.5	23.1	28.4	45.0
State Graduation Exam Scores	228	3.5	11.0	25.4	60.1
Work	230	0.9	21.3	44.8	33.0




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The Philadelphia Inquirer

### More top high schools drop out of class-rank system

[http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20161030\\_More\\_top\\_high\\_schools\\_drop\\_out\\_of\\_class-rank\\_system.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20161030_More_top_high_schools_drop_out_of_class-rank_system.html)

October 30, 2016

by Kathy Bocella, Staff Writer

For the West Chester Area School District, the last straw for class rank came when a **University of Pennsylvania admission officer** told school officials that a highly qualified graduate had been rejected because she was ranked 15th out of 320 students.

**"They said, 'If you didn't rank her, she would have gotten in.'"** Superintendent James Scanlon said of the student, who had earned a 3.9 grade-point average in the high-achieving Chester County district.

Now West Chester may be joining a growing number of districts around the country in eliminating class rank in its high schools - a high-stakes strategy that educators hold could help some of their students get into the nation's elite colleges, since those schools often overlook candidates who aren't in the rarefied percentiles.

The movement has gained such popularity in New Jersey during the last 10 years, said Albert Betts, admissions director at Rowan University, that "we no longer use or even record class rank as part of our admission evaluation process."

Educators who favor dropping the system argue that in the best districts, where the students are highly competitive, the differences in grade-point average between the No. 1 and No. 20 or 25 students can be minuscule. Yet colleges might look unfavorably on that lower-ranked student.

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## Grading Criteria

1. Product
2. Process
3. Progress



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## Three Types of Grading Criteria

1. **Product** (*Achievement of learning goals*)
2. **Process** (*Behaviors that enable learning*)
3. **Progress** (*Improvement or learning gain*)

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### Academic

Communication  
Creativity / Innovation  
Critical Thinking / Problem solving  
Application / Transference

### Compliance

Behavior in class  
Class attendance  
Conduct  
Neatness of work  
Punctuality in assignments  
Punctuality to class

### Learning Enablers

Attitude in class  
Class attendance/participation  
Class quizzes or "Spot-Checks"  
Daily class work  
Effort  
Engagement  
Formative assessments  
Goal setting  
Homework (Completion & Quality)  
Notebook/journal completion  
Planning & organization  
Study skills  
Time Management  
Work habits

### Social and Emotional Learning

Citizenship	Motivation
Collaboration/Teamwork	Persistence/Perseverance
Compassion	Reflection
Cooperation with classmates	Resilience
Empathy/Perspective taking	Respect
Ethics	Responsibility/Accountability
Flexibility/Adaptability	Self-advocacy
Grit	Self-awareness
Growth mindset	Self-efficacy
Habits of mind	Self-discipline/motivation
Help seeking & providing	Social skills
Initiative/Self direction	Tenacity
Integrity	Tolerance
Leadership	

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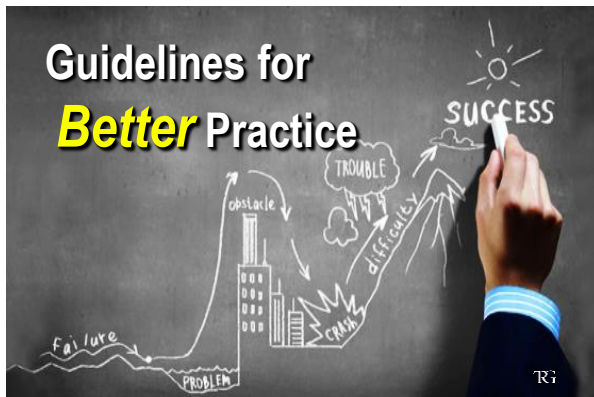
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## Guidelines for **Better** Practice



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# 1. Begin with a clear *statement of purpose.*

- ✓ Why use grading and reporting?
- ✓ For whom is the information intended?
- ✓ What are the desired results?



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## 2. Provide *accurate* and *meaningful* descriptions of student learning.

- ✓ More a challenge in *effective communication*
- ✓ Less an exercise in *quantifying achievement*



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## 3. Use grading and reporting to *enhance teaching and learning.*

- ✓ Facilitate communication
- ✓ Improve efforts to help students



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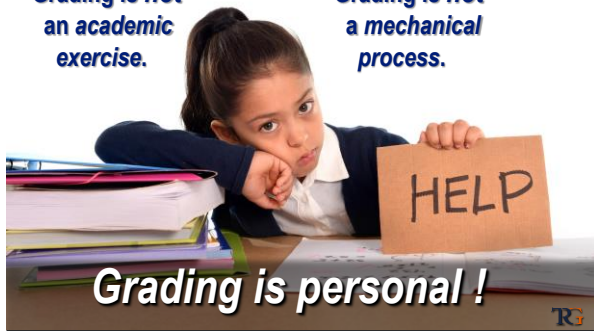
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Grading is *not*  
an academic  
exercise.

Grading is *not*  
a mechanical  
process.



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*Important Distinction:*

**Managers** know how to do things right.

**Leaders** know the right things to do!



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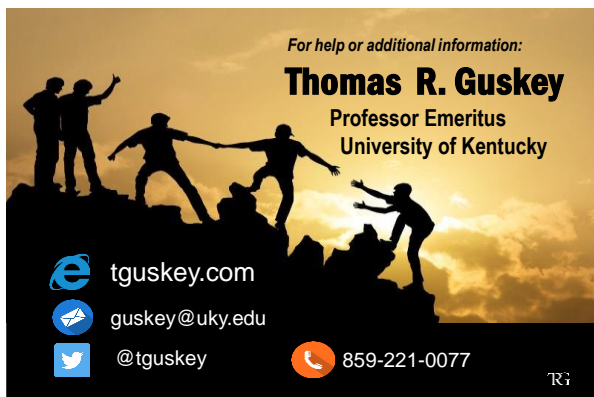
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