GRADING STRATEGIES

Alternative Grading Models: Portfolios

Portfolio grading was developed as an alternative to the traditional evaluation model in which students pass in papers on assigned due dates to be graded by the teacher and then simply filed away. Because the use of portfolios forces students to write many drafts of their papers, receiving feedback at many points, and choose which papers they want to be graded, this grading model tries to undermine the message frequently sent to students by the traditional model that writing is "completed" as soon as it is passed in and that the teacher has complete control over what is graded.

Advantages:
- Encourages students to see revision as an ongoing process that never truly reaches closure
- Fives students more control over their own grading
- Forces students to become better readers and critics of their own work

How to Set Up a Class Using Portfolios

Assignments:
A classroom incorporating the portfolio method is not radically different from a traditional writing class. Writing assignments are still given regularly and due dates are assigned for drafts. The key difference is that the "final" due date for a given assignment does not result in a grade assigned to that draft; the grading process only occurs once or twice a quarter when the "portfolio" is due. A student places each draft of every assignment in this portfolio (usually simply an expandable folder.)

Drafting:
Assigning due dates for multiple drafts and providing a venue for

feedback--either from the teacher or peers, but usually both--is essential to a portfolio classroom meant to encourage revision. Hence, frequent peer responding sessions, conferences with the teacher, or written comments by the teacher should be incorporated into any syllabus using a portfolio grading method. Students receive credit, in terms of "complete" or "incomplete" for finishing each draft but are not graded on them. Some provision should be made for a reduction of total points, or overall grade, for failure to write certain drafts. In this way, the student receives credit for the drafts even though
they are not graded.

Grading:
There are several ways to grade a completed portfolio, but the basic principle is the same. The student selects a designated number of papers (e.g., 2 out of 4 writing assignments) to be graded from the portfolio. The students may turn in the last draft of each assignment on which they received comments, or they may rewrite this draft as many times as they wish past the original due date until they have a final copy they wish to be graded. In this way, the student must judge the relative quality of her or his work and has ultimate control over the writing to be evaluated.

Some teachers require students to complete this selection and grading process at various intervals throughout the quarter, most frequently at mid-term and final time. Other teachers grade the selected papers only at the end of the quarter. The grading itself can be done holistically by a group of teachers, holistically by the class itself, or individually by the teacher. (see the teacher resource "Holistic Grading" for more information). The final grade is determined by the average of the selected papers, or the teacher may choose to judge improvement over the term by examining the complete portfolio as well as grading individual papers. Some teachers include a third component to the grading process in the form of student self-evaluation, an evaluation which requires the student to review his or her own portfolio and conduct an analysis of his or her progress.

In sum, the final grade in a portfolio classroom usually includes some combination of the following:

1. Credit for all completed drafts
2. Grades on student-selected papers
3. An analysis of student improvement and progress
4. Student self-analysis of their own progression