

## Tips for Grading and Giving Students Feedback

### Special Options

---

*The following is an excerpt from my upcoming book, "Tween Crayons and Curfews: Tips for Middle School Teachers [1]. In this chapter, titled, "Tips for Dealing with the Grading and Feedback Masses," I provide an insight into my own grade book and give advice on how to cut down on the stack of papers and assignments while still giving effective feedback to students.*

---

I don't know how your desk looks after your classes hand things in, but mine looks like a mountain range of stacks. In fact, I need to launch an expedition just to reach the top of the piles in order to grade them by deadline. Think about it: 36-42 kids per class, 6 periods a day, maybe 3 assignments per week. How does a new or veteran teacher handle the hours of grading that can amount to a second full-time job?

And as our class sizes increase, something's gotta give. The key is to provide feedback in different formats. It keeps students alert to your message, and it keeps you from going out of your mind. Here are just some tips, some old, some new, to help you towards your own grading sanity:

**1. Use Rubrics for Preemptive feedback:** After watching my three-year-old son one day attempt a thorough teeth-brushing session, I jokingly said, "I definitely give that a B at best." He paused. "What's best?" he asked.

I won't bore you with my description of tooth brushing excellence. However, I will say that it got me thinking that many students don't know how to ask this question. Which brings me to rubrics. Rubrics aren't just about summative feedback, "Here's how you did," they are also a sort of preemptive feedback, "Here's what you need to do."

**2. Only focus feedback on one skill** - Think about it from a student's point of view: it makes a greater impact and is less defeating to see specific notes on a single topic then to see the explosion of pen critiquing every past lesson missed.

**3. Only focus feedback on one part of the assignment** - Only comment on the first paragraph or only the first 5 questions of an assignment. Better yet, allow a student to choose the section or numbers they feel best represent their comprehension.

**4. Rotate students to give deeper feedback to** - Sure each student turns in the assignment, but do you really need to focus as intently on all 200 of them equitably every time? Rotate groups of students that get more percentage of your attention.

**5. Train students to give feedback to each other** - Teach the students to give the first wave of feedback to each other. This saves you from having to repeatedly write the same basic comments that could have been easily caught by a peer.

**6. "Comment rather than correct"** - Carol Jago reminds us that it's the students job to correct their errors. In fact, it would be even more powerful for them to identify the errors in the first place using hints provided by you:

In your essay, I see (general mistake) appear X-amount of times. In your history project, I see two date errors. In your math assignment, I see three equations that do not add up.

**7. Create a key of feedback symbols** - Identify the most common errors that you predict you will see. Develop a key of symbols that you can use in the margins instead of writing in sentences or bullets. This will require students to translate as well, which embeds the lesson even further.

**8. Outsource the grading** - Sometimes, assignments will take a huge leap in quality when students think someone other than their own teacher is seeing them. Ask administrators to get involved, switch stacks with other teachers, assign your other periods to evaluate the work. Outsource occasionally, and you just might find the students stepping up their work.

**9. Keep them in suspense** - Keep the final grade of an assignment as a carrot dangling until the feedback is read, attempted, and proven. Make them solve some of the problems in the assignment based on your feedback, and trade their solutions for access to their score.

**10. Feedback Note-taking** - If the one who does the work is doing the learning, should not the student be the one writing down the feedback? You conference; they write.

**11. Stagger due dates for your classes.** There is no rule that says all 200 shoeboxes or flipbooks have to show up at your door on the same date.

**12. And while you're at it, give them a way to give feedback to you.** If they believe that you are reading their feedback, they will be more likely to read yours. Develop a survey, via hard copy or one on [surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), for them to fill out at the end of a unit, quarter, semester, whatever. Ask them what worked and what didn't. Model your own comfort at criticism and they will work harder at their own.

---

*The unabridged chapter includes more in-depth advice as well as templates and surveys to help you navigate through the mountains of grading that can weigh down a teacher both in the classroom and at home. The book is available at the Web site [Eye on Eye Education Publishing \[1\]](#) and will be available at [Amazon \[2\]](#) on March 15.*

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/grading-tips-student-feedback-heather-wolpert-gawron>

**Links:**

[1] <http://eyeoneducation.com/prodinfo.asp?number=7180-5>

[2] <http://www.amazon.com/>

*This article originally published on 3/3/2011*

**Edutopia: What Works in Education © 2010 The George Lucas Educational Foundation • All rights reserved.**