

Grading Philosophy

Professor Dolan

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I am extremely generous with accommodations for students experiencing illness and family emergencies. But extenuating circumstances notwithstanding, I have high standards for evaluating academic work.

In general, students who meet all expectations of the course will receive a A- grade and students who meet most expectations of the course will receive a B+ grade. I consider all B+ and A- students to be highly successful! Grades of A are reserved for students who consistently exceed expectations. I cannot tell you how to exceed expectations; by definition, if you are exceeding them, it is in a way that I cannot anticipate. But every semester I have a few students who submit particularly thoughtful or compelling work or who carry themselves in an exceptionally mature or impressive way in the classroom, and these are the students who receive As. I have never awarded a final grade of A+.

I believe that grades reflect the quality of a paper or an exam. Olympic medals are awarded on the basis of excellence of performance, not how hard the Olympian worked to get there, and this is how I view grades. I also stress that grades reflect the quality of the product, *not* the quality of the student or person. I have written glowing letters of recommendation for B and C students whom I have observed to be hard-working or passionate or other wonderful qualities. I have also politely declined to write letters of recommendation for some A students who submit faultless work but about whom I have personal reservations. Please do not be embarrassed or ashamed of any grade. It is an invitation to learn how to improve the quality of your work. I want to see you succeed by submitting excellent work that demonstrates mastery.

It is OK to not perform your best all the time. We can't succeed at everything all the time. You might receive an imperfect grade because you have tried something new and challenging or because you are prioritizing other things in your life. That is normal and OK. If you tell me these things, it won't change the grade I give you (again, grades reflect the quality of the product), but it can help me contextualize my discussion of your performance in a letter of recommendation. Grades are important, but so is your personal maturity to recognize your limitations and accept imperfections in your record.

You are welcome to request that I regrade an assignment. If you would like me to regrade, please submit a memo explaining what grade you believe your assignment deserves and why. You will need to provide evidence from your submitted work for why it meets the specific criteria I included in the grading rubric. I grade and regrade based on the words on the page, not what you meant to say. Your memo is due two weeks from when you have received your graded assignment. I will regrade the entire assignment. A regrade can go up or down.

I rely on strict numerical thresholds when calculating the final grade, and I don't round. I see this as an equity issue: I try to minimize the role that my own biases play in grading, and also,

students from marginalized backgrounds are less likely to ask for a reevaluation of their grade. I try to build generosity into the structure of the grade by heavily weighting participation, where I tend to be generous, instead of bumping some students up and not others at the end when tabulating the final average. I know that when someone is close to a threshold, I've already given them some cushion and benefit of the doubt in their grade.

Grade	Minimum
A+	97
A	93
A-	90
B+	87
B	83
B-	80
etc.	