

Going Gradeless  
in the  
Secondary History  
Classroom

<http://bit.ly/32eMHjy>

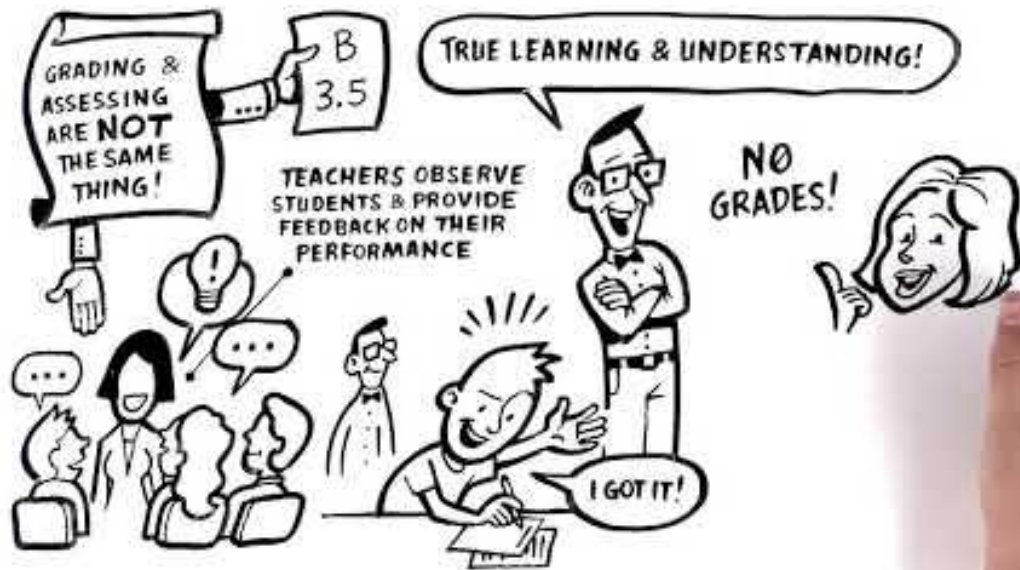
Lisa Hicknell (she/her)  
WRDSB  
@hicknell

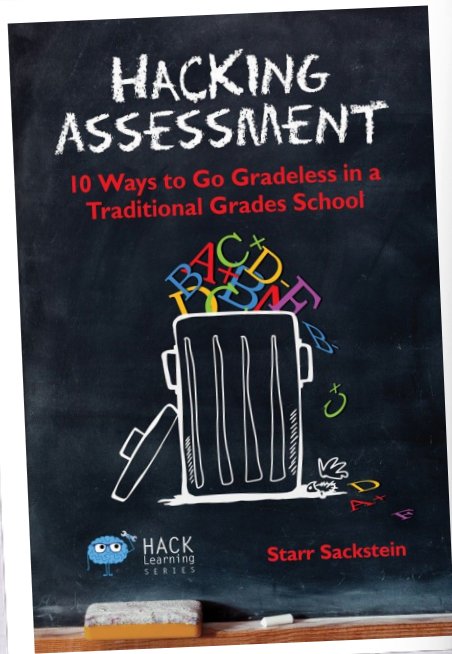


"In a gradeless classroom,  
the perpetual lies that  
numbers and letters tell  
about learning would cease  
to exist."

A nine-year-old's  
reflection about  
report cards







Hacking Assessment  
Starr Sackstein



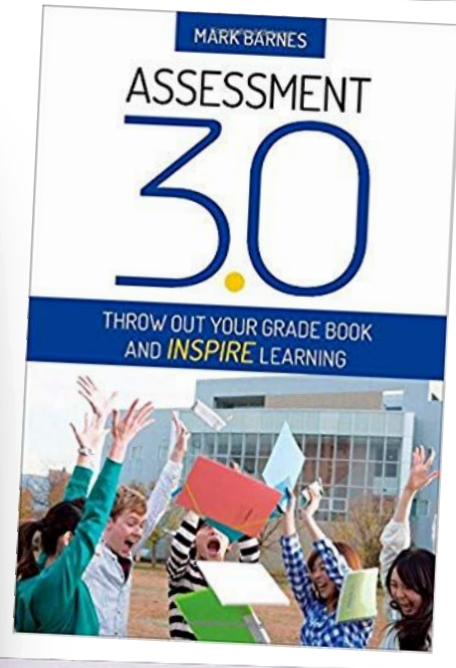
@TG2Chat



Teachers Going Gradeless - TG2



[teachersgoinggradeless.com](http://teachersgoinggradeless.com)



Assessment 3.0  
Mark Barnes

## Step 1: Be Transparent

- Share your approach with
  - Admin
  - Parents
  - Students
- Be prepared to respond to their concerns ... they will have questions!

My name is Lisa Hicknell and I look forward to engaging in a learning journey with your child this semester in the CHC 2DI - Canadian History course.

In addition to being a classroom teacher, I am also the iLST (Innovative Learning Support Teacher) at GRCI. In this role I am given the time, opportunity, and encouragement to explore innovative teaching and learning practices. One practice that I have been very interested in pursuing is the concept of the gradeless classroom. After a few years of extensive reading and thinking about what this would look like in CHC 2DI, this will be the first semester I run a fully gradeless classroom.

Rest assured that eliminating grades does not eliminate learning. Your child will still be required to successfully demonstrate the essential learnings in the course. As your child completes tasks that demonstrate the learning goals, I will provide both written and verbal feedback about what your child has accomplished and what may still need to be learned. This feedback will provide specific information that will help them navigate the next steps of their learning journey. You will be able to review your child's progress by viewing the Descriptive Feedback document in their Google Drive or by following our classroom on Seesaw. This feedback approach to assessment leads to self-evaluation and ultimately to mastery of learning.

You may wonder why I would want to shift away from the system of grading that both you and I likely experienced in school. Research indicates that measuring learning with numbers, percentages, or letters is an inadequate way to assess learning. Meanwhile, classrooms that eliminate quantitative grades have been shown to have a positive impact on student interest in learning, academic risk taking, quality of thinking, and the mental wellbeing of students.

While my classroom will be gradeless, the WRDSB and Ontario Ministry of Education still require that I put a numerical grade on the two provincial report cards. When it comes time to do this, your child and I will review how their completed learning tasks demonstrate the course learning goals and essential learnings. After this evaluation and our discussion, your child will decide what the progress report and final report card grades should be. This process will help your child become a self-evaluative, independent learner. If your student assigns a grade that is not compatible with my assessment of their performance and quality of work, the student will be asked to reevaluate their class performance. When I discuss the report card grade with your student, they will be expected to defend their learning using a portfolio as evidence.

It is my hope that shifting to a gradeless classroom will build a culture of student empowerment where the focus is on the learning, rather than number or letter labels. I welcome your questions, concerns and feedback as the semester progresses. Please feel free to contact me at any time at [lisa\\_hicknell@wrdsb.ca](mailto:lisa_hicknell@wrdsb.ca).

[Click here for a copy of my parent letter!](#)

## Step 2: Clarify and Publicize Your Standards

- **CONTENT LEARNING STANDARDS**
  - **course -specific knowledge that students need to show they KNOW by the end of the course**

1. Describe key social, economic, and political events, trends, and developments, and assess their significance for different groups in Canada,
2. Analyse key interactions within and between different communities in Canada, and between Canada and the international community, and how they affected Canadian society and politics
3. Explain how significant individuals, groups, organizations, events, and social changes contributed to the development of identity, citizenship, and heritage in Canada.

Mine for CHC 2D based on the overall expectations the curriculum document



## Step 2: Clarify and Publicize Your Standards

- **CURRICULAR LEARNING STANDARDS**
  - **Skills, strategies, and processes that students develop over time and need to show they can DO by the end of the course**

1. Use historical inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas and data; and communicate findings and decisions
2. Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments
3. Compare and contrast continuities and changes over different points in time
4. Assess how underlying conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments, and analyze multiple intended and unintended consequences
5. Explain and infer different perspectives on people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs



Learning Activity: Develop a product that answers the inquiry question: “To what extent did Canada’s involvement in (your topic) make it a stronger or weaker nation?”

Success Criteria:

- Demonstrates complete and accurate knowledge of the topic
- Responds to inquiry question using specific evidence about the topic
- Applies at least one concept of historical thinking to the topic
- Communicates conclusions to peers in an engaging, appropriate, and informative way

**Step 3: Design learning activities that support the learning standards with clear success criteria.**

## Step 4: Assess and Provide Feedback

- x During the PROCESS to support student learning
  - x Research notes
  - x Conversations
  - x Observations
- x After completion of the PRODUCT to comment on the extent to which the success criteria were met

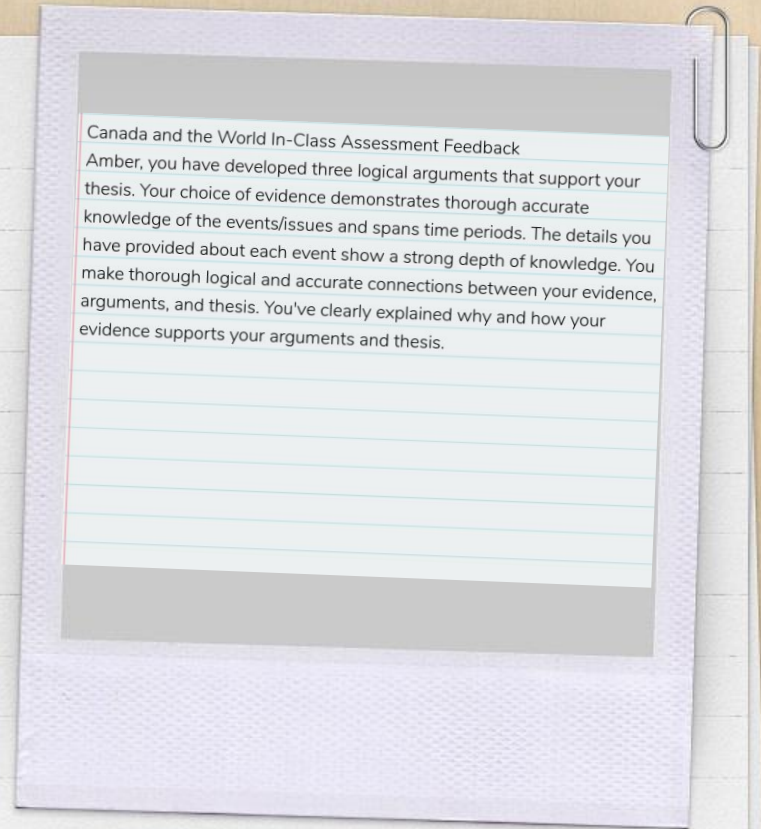


Documentation  
of this goes in  
learning  
portfolios!

## Feedback . . .

There are many options available. Give them a try and see what works for you and your students

- x Traditional rubric
- x Single point rubric
- x SE2R



# Phase 1: Leveled Rubric

## Teacher Impact:



quick and easy for me to circle/highlight

## Student Impact:



Reinforced thinking about levels



Curious about what their overall level was



Students didn't use the feedback to improve future work, text largely ignored

Historical Inquiry Assignment Rubric					
Criteria	1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<b>Knowledge/Understanding</b>					
<b>Knowledge of Content</b> Choice of evidence	choice of evidence demonstrates no knowledge of content	choice of evidence demonstrates limited knowledge of content	choice of evidence demonstrates some knowledge of content	choice of evidence demonstrates considerable knowledge of content	choice of evidence demonstrates thorough knowledge of content
<b>Understanding of Content</b> Use of evidence in support of arguments	use of evidence in support of arguments demonstrates no understanding of content	use of evidence in support of arguments demonstrates limited understanding of content	use of evidence in support of arguments demonstrates some understanding of content	use of evidence demonstrates considerable understanding of content	use of evidence demonstrates thorough understanding of content
<b>Thinking</b>					
<b>Use of planning skills</b> Level of research	No quality research	Limited quality research conducted	Some quality research conducted	Considerable amount of quality research	High degree of quality research conducted
<b>Use of processing skills</b> Presentation of thesis	No thesis statement	Thesis lacks clarity and may not present one coherent point. It may not be debatable.	Thesis is somewhat clear and may not present one coherent point. It may not be debatable.	Thesis is considerably clear and presents one coherent point. It is debatable.	Thesis is thoroughly clear and presents one coherent point. It is debatable.
Arguments are logically related to the main ideas	No arguments	Arguments unclear. They do not support the thesis. They may not be debatable.	Arguments are somewhat clear. Some may not support the thesis. They may not be debatable.	Arguments are generally clear, considerably supportive of the thesis, and debatable	Arguments are very clear, highly supportive of the thesis, and debatable
<b>Use of critical thinking skills</b> Use of concepts of historical thinking	concepts of historical thinking used with no effectiveness	concepts of historical thinking used with limited effectiveness	concepts of historical thinking used with some effectiveness	concepts of historical thinking used with considerable effectiveness	concepts of historical thinking used with high degree of effectiveness
<b>Communication</b>					
Expression and organization of ideas and information (e.g., clear expression, logical organization) in oral, visual, and written forms	expresses and organizes ideas and information with no effectiveness	expresses and organizes ideas and information with limited effectiveness	expresses and organizes ideas and information with some effectiveness	expresses and organizes ideas and information with considerable effectiveness	expresses and organizes ideas and information with a high degree of effectiveness
Use of conventions*, vocabulary, and terminology of history in oral, visual, and written forms	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with no effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with limited effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with some effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with considerable effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with a high degree of effectiveness
<b>Application</b> Uses Chicago style documentation to acknowledge all sources (footnotes and bibliography)	No documentation	Documentation attempted with many errors	Documentation is somewhat complete with some errors	Documentation is complete with few errors	Documentation is complete with almost no errors
<b>Credibility of sources</b>	No sources	No academic sources	Some academic sources	Mostly academic sources	All academic sources
<b>Persuasiveness and Interest</b>	Not interesting or convincing	Interesting and persuasive to a limited extent	Interesting and persuasive to some extent	Interesting and persuasive to a considerable extent	Thoroughly persuasive and interesting

## Phase 2: Single Point Rubric

### Teacher Impact:



Feedbacking myself to death



Ability to personalize feedback

### Student Impact:



Still trying to determine overall level



Still ignoring feedback



Still not using it to feed forward

Criteria	-		+
<b>Knowledge/ Understanding</b> Knowledge of Content Identifies key facts and terms related to topic  Understanding of Context Selects most important, relevant, and reliable details to support conclusions			Collection of evidence demonstrates considerable knowledge of content  Use of evidence in final product reveals considerable understanding of content
<b>Thinking</b> Use of planning skills Asks questions, gathers, and organizes evidence  Use of processing skills Interprets, analyzes, and evaluates evidence to formulate conclusions  Use of critical/creative thinking skills Use of concepts of historical thinking  Use of inquiry, decision-making, and problem-solving processes			Asks questions, gathers, and organizes evidence with considerable effectiveness  Interprets, analyzes, and evaluates evidence to formulate conclusions with considerable effectiveness  Uses the concepts of historical thinking with considerable effectiveness  Uses inquiry, decision-making, and problem-solving processes with considerable effectiveness
<b>Communication</b> Expression and organization of ideas and information (e.g., clear expression, logical organization) in oral, visual, and written forms  Communication for different audiences and purposes  Use of conventions*, vocabulary, and terminology of history in oral, visual, and written forms			Expresses and organizes ideas and information in final product with considerable effectiveness  Communicates for different audiences and purposes in final product to a considerable degree  Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology in final product with considerable effectiveness
<b>Application:</b> Transfer of knowledge and skills to new or familiar contexts -CRAAP test -documentation methods -concepts of historical thinking -inquiry model -final product			Transfers knowledge to process and final product with considerable effectiveness

## Phase 3: SE2R

### Teacher Impact:

- 😊 Ability to personalize feedback
- 😊 Manageable workflow

### Student Impact:

- 😊 Decreased curiosity about levels/grades
- 😊 Easier to digest
- 😊 Feel coached rather than criticized

**SE2R**

**S** **SUMMARIZE**  
Provide a one- or two-sentence statement of what was accomplished.  
Ex: Tori, you analyzed the plot in the first chapter of our novel.

**E** **EXPLAIN**  
Give a detailed, objective explanation of what learning is demonstrated and/or what is missing, based on the activity's guidelines.  
Ex: You identified the conflict in the story, but I don't see an identified setting in your response.

**R** **REDIRECT**  
When learning outcomes are not demonstrated, redirect students to prior learning or to seek help from the teacher or a peer.  
Ex: Please explain the setting and how it impacts the decisions of the protagonist.

**2R** **RESUBMIT**  
Ask students to resubmit activities, projects or assessments, after they've returned to prior lessons and models and made changes to the work. This way the teacher can re-evaluate for mastery learning.  
Ex: Let me know when you have updated your response.

Adapted from Assessment 2.0 by Mark Stassen (2016)

# Stage 5: Self-Reflection

## PART A: KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- WHAT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE TASK IN MY OWN WORDS?
- WHAT LEARNING GOALS DID I MEET AND WHAT EVIDENCE FROM MY WORK SUPPORTS THAT ASSESSMENT?

## PART B: SELF-ASSESSMENT

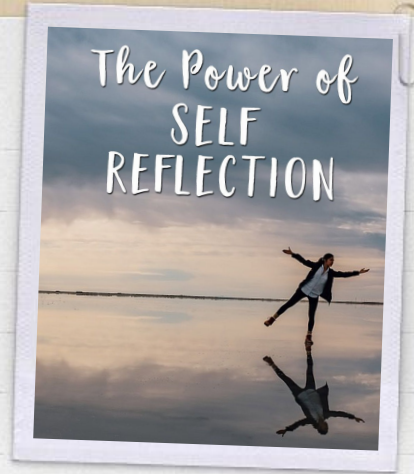
- WHAT DID I DO TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THE TASK?
- WHAT CHALLENGES DID I FACE AND HOW DID I OVERCOME THEM?
- IF I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT AGAIN, WHAT WOULD I DO DIFFERENTLY?
- WOULD MY OTHER GROUP MEMBERS WANT TO WORK WITH ME AGAIN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

## PART C: LEARNING SKILLS

- WHICH LEARNING SKILLS DID I DEMONSTRATE AND/OR DEVELOP DURING THIS ACTIVITY?
- HOW EFFECTIVELY DID I DEMONSTRATE THEM?
- WHAT LEARNING SKILLS GOALS CAN I SET FOR NEXT TIME?

## PART D: SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- WHAT DID I DO TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FINAL PRODUCT?
- WHAT SKILLS DID I LEARN OR REFINE WHILE COMPLETING THIS ACTIVITY?
- IN WHAT WAYS CAN I APPLY THE SKILLS OR KNOWLEDGE FROM THIS ACTIVITY TO MY OTHER COURSES OR MY FUTURE CAREER?



Responses go in the students' learning portfolios!

## Stage 6: Learning Portfolios

- x A collection of evidence of student learning
- x Includes
  - x Products
  - x Feedback
  - x Images
  - x Videos
- x Collaboratively curated by teacher and student
- x Transparency!!
- x Choose the format that works for you and is approved by your board/admin





## Stage 7: Determining a Grade






- x Google Form:
  - x Students identify to what extent they have demonstrated each learning standard (level)
  - x Conclusion must be supported with evidence from learning portfolio
  - x Report Card comment
    - x what I learned
    - x what my strengths are
    - x what I need to work on



## Stage 7: Determining a Grade

- x Grading Conference
  - x Student and teacher discuss appropriateness of Google Form responses
  - x Portfolio is available in front of us
  - x An overall level is determined based on levels for each learning standard
  - x Level is translated into mark by Gradebook

### Descriptive Assessment Criteria

<b>5</b> Exemplary		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Always produces exemplary work; missing no pieces of evidence</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Always exhibits novel, insightful, and/or creative ways to show learning</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Thoroughly meets all learning goals all of the time</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Each piece of evidence demonstrates growth and progression over the previous one</li></ul>
<b>4</b> High Degree		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Produces work that exceeds the standards; missing few or no pieces of evidence</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Almost always exhibits novel, insightful, and/or creative ways to show learning</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates learning goals fully, frequently, and/or consistently almost all of the time</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows a high degree of growth</li></ul>
<b>3</b> Considerable		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Produces work that meets the standards; missing few or no pieces of evidence</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Exhibits mostly novel, insightful, and/or creative and a few standard ways to show learning</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates learning goals fully, frequently, and/or consistently to a considerable degree</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows considerable evidence of growth</li></ul>
<b>2</b> Somewhat		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Produces work that is approaching the standard; may be missing some pieces of evidence</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Exhibits a combination of standard and novel/insightful/creative ways to show learning</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates learning goals somewhat fully, frequently, and/or consistently</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows some evidence of growth</li></ul>
<b>1</b> Limited		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Completes work that is of adequate quality; missing several pieces of evidence</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Exhibits standard ways to show learning</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates all learning goals at least once</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows little evidence of growth</li></ul>

Students use this chart to help them land on an appropriate level

## The Report Card becomes entirely student-driven.

They determine the grade,  
learning skills, and  
comments. The teacher has  
transitioned from evaluator  
to coach.

## Reflections:



Everything I thought I knew about teaching began to unravel in the **BEST POSSIBLE WAY!**

- x High stakes assessments
- x Formative vs. summative
- x Teacher vs. Student-centred
- x Process vs. product



## RELATIONSHIPS!

“GRADING INCREASES THE FEAR OF FAILURE, AND AN INCREASED FEAR OF FAILURE REDUCES THE WILLINGNESS TO TAKE CHANCES. WHY TAKE A RISK IF THE RESULT OF THAT RISK MIGHT LEAD TO A LOWER GRADE?”

## The Growth Continues:

- X Adopt more asset-based language when giving feedback
- X Restructure courses to better allow students to work at their own pace
- X Bring other colleagues on board  
... a work in progress!!



What is **one** shift you could make starting tomorrow?

- x Align assessment to standards/overall expectations
- x Make success criteria explicit
- x Tallied marks to leveled rubrics to single point rubrics to SE2R
- x Reconsider high stakes assessments
- x Conference with your students about their learning and use these conversations as evidence while determining a grade
- x Invite students to write their own report card comments



“Every day  
do something  
that will inch you  
closer  
to a better tomorrow.”

# Thanks!

## Any questions?

You can find me at:

x @hicknell

x [lisa\\_hicknell@wrdsb.ca](mailto:lisa_hicknell@wrdsb.ca)





## SlidesCarnival icons are editable shapes

This means that you can:

- Resize them without losing quality.
- Change fill color and opacity.

Isn't that nice? :)

Examples:

