

Philosophy TA Workshop: Effective Grading Practices and Strategies



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Activity: Grading Dotmocracy

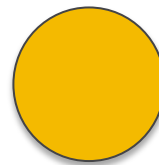
- I will hand everyone out (the same) 4 assignments
- Grade these four answers on your own
- When finished, place the corresponding assignment dots to the grade you've given each assignment



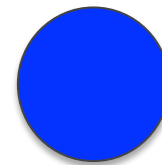
Assignment
1



Assignment
2



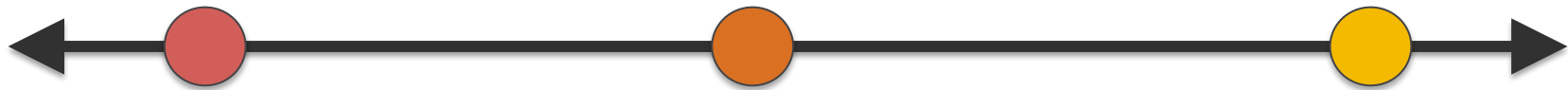
Assignment
3



Assignment
4

Agenda

Grading Timeline



- Beginning: Assigning the Assignment
- Middle: Marking and Effective Feedback
- End: Returning the Assignment

- Announcements

Grading Timeline



Beginning!

Assigning the Assignment

Assigning the Assignment

- My students seem really stressed about writing these essays! How do I help them?
- How Do I get my Students to Write Better Essays?

☹ Fact: Sometimes, students care more about their grades than knowledge and learning.



Some think the ability to get a good grade is some secret, or, in philosophy, completely arbitrary.

As instructors and TAs, we need to respond to this.

How can we reduce the stress associated with grading—and use grading for learning?

Assigning the Assignment



☺ **Fact: We know what it will take for them to get an A on assignment! We shouldn't keep this a secret from our students!**

We can provide a lot of feedback to our students before we have even written a single word on their assignment.

Providing students with a clear sense of what you expect them to demonstrate will:

- Reduce student anxiety and apprehension,
- Get your students to write better papers,
- Help you in grading more effectively and efficiently.

What to tell your students

1. How to Write a Philosophy Paper

- What are the aims, goals, and skills they will learn by writing the paper,
- What a good paper looks like,
- And what a bad paper looks like!

Spend class time going through this!

Example:

The Structure

Introduction

Position 1

Position 2

Critical
Assessment

Conclusion

Your aim here is to ***argue*** for one of the positions being stronger than the other based on ***reasons***.

CCP!!

You need to be as ***Clear***, ***Concise***, and ***Precise*** as you possibly can!

What do I tell them?

1. How to Write a Philosophy Paper

2. What Will They Be Graded On?

- What might you be looking for in a good philosophy essay?
- What are you grading them on?



Elements of an Essay

- Thesis Statement
- Content
- Depth of Research
- Clarity of Ideas
- Organization and Structure
- References, Sources, Citations
- Writing Style or Correct English Usage
- Independent Thought
- Other?

Activity: Rubric Design

Consider a “staple” philosophy essay assignment for 2nd year students.

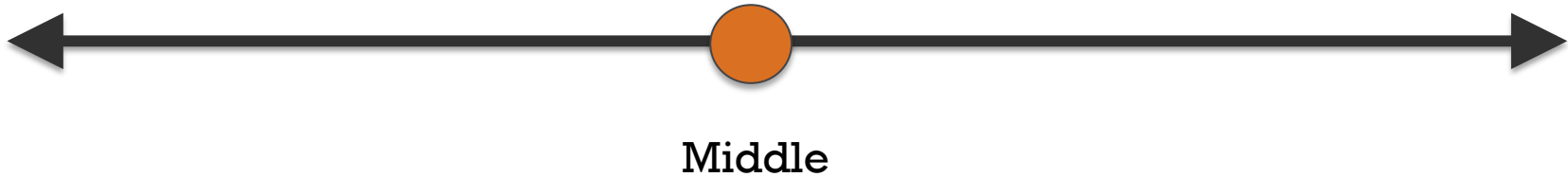
- Take 5 minutes to reflect on what is important to you in a philosophy essay
- Discuss with your group
- As a group, begin to think about what a rubric for this assignment might look like

Activity: Rubric Design

Things to think about:

- What type of rubric is appropriate?
 - Overall judgment of quality, or separate assessment of distinct elements?
 - Will your breakdown be by marks, or by letter?
- Does the rubric criteria map onto the course learning objectives and learning outcomes?
 - Where are the bulk of the marks awarded?
- How will writing mechanics figure into my scoring criteria?
 - Particularly important to consider, ESL students!
- Will I deduct marks or ignore the inclusion of irrelevant information in an assignment?

Grading Timeline



Marking and Effective Feedback

Grading Approaches

- **Example Approach:** The instructor identifies an A, B, C, and D paper, and discusses with TAs
- **Discussion Approach:** Choose one paper for all TAs to read individually and then get together as a group and discuss how you would mark it.
- **Collective Approach:** Consider marking as a group so that you can compare assignments and grades as you go.
- **Stacks:** skim through the papers and make stacks of what you think will be the A papers, B papers, etc.
- **One Q at a Time:** do all of one question before starting the next

Grading Strategies

- **Read before Marking:** Read five or six papers before you begin grading so that you get an idea of the general quality level.
- **Grammar and Spelling:** Do not correct every grammatical and spelling error. Correct a few (maybe the first page) and then comment that more exist and in the future the student needs to address this
- **Set a Timer:** This can help keep you on the time that you and your instructor have decided should be spent on a paper.
- **Take a break!** Marking is hard work and you become less reliable and if you are tired or burned out. Same goes for hunger.
- **Type Comments:** Consider typing comments onto a computer and making a file for each student. This keeps your comment legible and allows you to copy and paste common problems.
- Use a **marking code** or shorthand.
- If you get hung up on a paper, set it aside and come back to it
- Others?

Effective Feedback

Scenario

“ Grade: A.

This is a great paper. It is well written and a good argument. ”

How would you react to this as your grade and feedback?

What does good feedback look like?

Effective Feedback

The feedback process is the best chance to improve student learning and enhance their skills. To be effective, feedback needs to be ...

- timely,
- encouraging,
- and carefully tailored to the student.

Don't overwhelm students.

Limit feedback to the amount of information that the student can absorb. Identify the key areas that need additional work.

Feedback should be given to help, not hurt. Be encouraging. Remember, negativity creates defensiveness. Find the right balance between truth and kindness.

Effective Feedback

Feedback should be...

- **Constructive**
- **Objective**
- **Specific**
- **Actionable**

Effective Feedback: Tips

- The Complement Sandwich
- Use “The paper”, rather than “you” for critiques
- Use “I” in your comments
 - “I got lost here”, “I’m confused here, did you mean...”, “ I think...”, “I read”
- Structure comments as questions or suggestions rather than criticisms
- Use questions to identify errors
 - “More information?”, “Did you mean to say... x ?”
- Provide Suggestions on what they can do next time
- Incorporate peer feedback into class
- Others?

Activity: Writing Effective Feedback

With your table, prepare effective written feedback for the following issues...

- The paper has no argument
- The paper is covering too much
- The paper has no structure
- The paper does not present the right premises/argument
- The paper is poorly written (english)
- The paper makes a lot of claims
- The paper has plagiarized parts
- The paper only discusses one side of the argument

Grading Timeline



Returning Assignments

Returning Assignments: Tips

- Talk over your marks (but not the students!) with other graders before you turn work back
- Turn assignments back at the end of class
- Discuss overall performance (avg mark, distribution, etc)
- Go over major misconceptions or common problems
- Institute a “24-7” Rule
- Place the burden of proof on the student
 - Ask the student to explain how their work fulfills the requirements of your grading criteria (Either in person, or writing).
- Listen to your students’ concerns
 - You need to establish a professional relationship with your students. You are not their friend or parent, or a distant authority figure.
- Be future oriented
- Others?

Feedback Survey!

Questions?

Contact: mjacquar@uwo.ca

Thanks!
