



End of Semester Grading¹

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For the first many years of my teaching career, the grading of student papers and exams at the end of the term overwhelmed me. I dutifully wrote extensive comments on papers and exams, and I was an inveterate editor of grammar and punctuation (which I later learned in a Writing Across the Curriculum workshop [at Humboldt State University] is not even good pedagogical practice!). After several years of end of term almost all nighters and exhaustion, I finally realized that only a handful of undergraduate students had ever come back to pick up their graded exams and papers. I was recycling virtually all of these student products after 3 years!

I was not familiar with rubrics in those days, so what I eventually developed was a shorthand system of flagging what was really bad or worn, and what was really good and thoughtful. I used a simple system of + and – in the margins. That way, if a student did come to collect their work the next term, I could rather easily find where the problems were in their exam responses or papers. And I stopped editing the papers for grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.

So if you are looking at stacks of student work to grade next week, you might take this tip from me. Develop quick and dirty shorthand to use to get through those papers faster.

Then in the future, require student papers/projects to be turned in a couple of weeks before the semester ends. This way you will have time to evaluate and return their work, to provide a closing of the loop of the learning process for them. Think of developing rubrics for your assignments. They make the grading process go so much faster, and if you share the rubrics with the students, you are helping to clarify their understanding of what is expected of them. Yes developing rubrics is time consuming at first, but well worth the effort for both the students and your own benefit.

Material on grading rubrics and other topics can be found in the CTL Library located in the Mason Room at the Smith House.

¹ Judith Little (December 2009), “End of Semester Grading,” Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Humboldt State University. Retrieved on June 22, 2010 from <http://www3.humboldt.edu/celt/tips/e/>.