

Grading Contract

English 110 | Spring 2021

For this course, we will use a grading contract, a system of grades that are based primarily on your *labors* and *efforts*. That means that your final course letter grade will be the result of your participation, attendance, and completion of homework, assignments, and revisions. Thus, your grade will not be based on a subjective evaluation of your final assignments in comparison to the writing of your peers, which is how grades are usually assigned in writing and other courses.

Grading contracts are valuable for a number of reasons, including the fact that they:

- Offer you the opportunity to be experimental and exploratory in your writing—to take risks, rather than only producing writing that is thought to be “correct” or doing exactly and only “what the assignment requires” or “what the teacher wants”;
- Value the time, effort and labor you decide to commit to the class;
- Provide you with a clear and concrete understanding of your grade at all times throughout the semester (grades are simple and easy to calculate);
- Do not unfairly penalize or reward you for how much experience with writing and language you have prior to entering our class; all students have the same potential to earn an A;
- Privilege students who are investing the time, energy, and effort into literacy learning.

While grading contracts focus on quantifiable outcomes (attendance, participation, completed work), quality matters too; you are expected to carefully write and revise your writing assignments to meet certain goals and criteria. Grading contracts function on the belief that quality writing is the result of one’s efforts at drafting, getting and understanding feedback from others, and revising.

General Terms of Agreement

1. **Attendance & Lateness.** You agree to strive to attend required (virtual) classes and be on time. As of week 6, you may elect to forgo “live” class meetings and maintain attendance instead by 1) watching any recorded videos of our class session, 2) uploading notes on the class session(s), and 3) participating in any assigned Blackboard Discussions. All assignments will still be due on the same days/times. Being a few minutes late a few times in a semester is understandable, but we may need to talk if lateness becomes a problem. If extenuating circumstances prevent you from attending class, do not hesitate to contact me so that we can determine how to proceed.
2. **Participation & Collaboration.** You agree to participate in ways that best fit you and that are most appropriate for each day’s goal (by actively listening, taking notes, asking questions, offering comments, etc.). You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups, to share your writing, to listen supportively to the writing of others, and, when called for, give full and thoughtful assessments that help your colleagues consider ways to revise.
3. **Homework & Assignments.** You agree to strive to turn in on time all homework and assignments. All should be completed fully and meet all assignment requirements. If you face extenuating circumstances, please email me ahead of time. If you are absent, you are responsible for submitting work that’s due on time. *The following guidelines apply to all assignments, including homework, drafts, and final assignments:*

Timeliness:

Late Assignments: An assignment is considered “late” if it is turned in after its initial due date and time, but submitted within two days (48 hours). It will be marked as a “1” in the grade book.

Make-up Assignments: An assignment is considered a “make-up” if it is turned in at some point in the semester but after the 48-hour window. It will be marked as a “2” in the grade book.

Ignored Assignments. Any assignments not done at all, for whatever reason, are considered “Ignored.” Even one ignored assignment will prevent you from earning a B or higher in the course (see chart below). **IMPORTANT: Drafts of major essays *cannot* be submitted late. If drafts are *not* submitted on time, they will be considered “ignored.” AND, if assignments are *not completed* fully, they may be marked as “ignored” (see below).** It will be marked as a “3” in the grade book.

Completion:

Projects will not qualify as “complete” unless they have achieved all of the goals of the assignment as discussed in class or explained on handouts. This means that projects are not just done but done in the manner discussed. If I find that a given project is not “complete,” I will contact you about rewriting and how this will affect your final grade.

Improvement:

While you do not have to worry about anyone’s judgments or standards to meet the grading contract, you are obligated for all of your class work to carefully listen to and consider your colleagues’ and my comments. Feedback is essential to improvement. In this class, you won’t just correct errors or touch up pieces here and there. Each major essay and project will be substantially reshaped, extended, or complicated based on the feedback you receive. You will also make efforts to improve your copy editing skills. I certainly do not expect error-free texts, but I do ask that you take an active role in developing your uses of English. If too few revisions are made to your drafts over the course of the semester, I will contact you so that we can make a plan and/or determine how this will affect your final grade.

Overview of Grade Breakdown Guidelines

	# of Absences	# of Late Assigns.	# of Make-up Assigns.	# of Ignored Assigns.	# of Extra Assigns.
A	3 or fewer	3	0	0	2
B	4	4	1	0	0
C	5	5	2	1	0
D	6	6	3	2	0
F	7	6 or more	4 or more	3 or more	0

*Note: You only need one categorical item/column to dip for the entire grade to dip. In other words, having only 3 absences but 4 late assignments still puts your grade at a D.

"A" Grades

Grades of "A" depend on you 1) being absent three times or less, having three or fewer "late" assignments, and no "make-up" or "ignored" assignments; and 2) completing **extra assignments**. Completing extra assignments means that you will have gone above and beyond, which will increase your practice with language and literacy and earn you the top grade.

Here are the "extra assignments":

1. **Extended Phase 2 Essay:** Rather than analyzing *one* text in your Phase 2 Essay, you will analyze *two* and the essay's length will be extended by two pages.
2. **Extended Phase 3 Essay:** Your Phase 3 essay will likewise be extended by two pages and will need to include a peer-reviewed research article as one of seven sources.

"B" Grades

In a way, "B" is the default grade for this class. You earn a "B" if you put in good time and effort and do all required work in an acceptable fashion. Grades of "B" depend on you having four or fewer absences, having four or fewer "late" assignments, no more than one "make-up" assignment, and no "ignored" assignments. No extra assignments are required for a "B."

Grades Lower Than "B"

I hope no one will aim for lower grades. If you miss more than four classes, turn in more than four "late" assignments, turn in more than one "make up" assignment, or have any "ignored" assignments, your grade will drop below a "B." Thus, the quickest way to slide to a "C," "D," or "F" is to miss classes and/or not submit assignments. See the "Breakdown" section above to see the specifications for each grade below a "B."

Exceptions

+/- Grades. +/- grades will be assigned at my discretion. They will be used in cases when 1) your assignments and participation suggest you labored above and beyond the expectations (+); 2) the quality and completeness of your major projects, smaller assignments, and participation is lacking in one way or another (-); or, 3) in the case that that a plea is granted and/or we determine special accommodations are in order (see below). You will be notified if your final grade will have a + or -.

Pleas. Because we all know that life isn't perfect and that each semester does not always go according to our plans, I offer you one plea that you can make to me to change your progress in the course. For instance, you might plea to get a late or missed assignment removed from your record so that you may still meet our contract, etc. **Anyone can make a plea to me once during the semester.** However, there must be some kind of special or extenuating circumstance that warrants the plea. You may not plead a case just because you want something removed from your record. For a plea to be granted, you may be asked to complete an extra assignment, such as researching and writing about a course-related topic or meeting with a consultant at the Writing Center.

Accommodations/Inclusivity. The goal of the Grading Contract is to meet you where you are in your reading and writing experience and to support you in growing as a critical thinker, reader, writer, communicator, and collaborator. Additionally, the purpose is to ensure students are having the opportunity to work in a just environment that adapts to their needs and equally supports each student's learning. Thus, when necessary I will work with individuals on a case-by-case basis to determine how best to accommodate your needs as a learner and the course's learning outcomes. Ultimately, the Grading Contract functions as a model for forming professional relationships and professional communication practices.

University and Military Obligations. Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, performance, band, etc.) will not count against you, as stipulated by university policy, as long as you FIRST provide written documentation within the first two weeks of the semester of all absences. This same policy applies if you have mandatory military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.). This will allow us to determine ahead of time how you will meet assignments and our contract, despite being absent.

Grading contracts in the field of rhetoric and composition originate from researchers like Dr. Peter Elbow and Dr. Asao Inoue who have sought more equitable and just grading practices. This grading contract has been adapted from their work, as well as from the contracts of Dr. Missy Watson, Dr. Nicole Howell, and Dr. Kate Navickas.

***By staying in our course, you agree to all of the above terms, and I agree to keep track of the above details responsibly and enforce them democratically.**