

## Are Your Grades Justifiable?

Ken O’Conner writes that there is no such thing as a correct or “right” grade for a student. If we are giving grades, O’Conner suggests that what we must strive for are grades that are “justifiable”. Justifiable grades have four elements: Accuracy, Consistency, Meaning, Supportive of Learning and Growth.

Criteria for Justification	Shortcoming in Traditional Practice	Getting to Better Practice (O’Conner’s 15 Fixes)
<b>Accuracy</b>	Including elements that distort achievement such as bonus points, extra credit, attendance, and behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t include student behaviors in grades, only academic work related to the course objectives.</li> <li>• Don’t penalize late work, rely on natural consequences and support the learner instead.</li> <li>• Don’t give extra credit or bonus points (stop using grades as extrinsic motivators)</li> <li>• Don’t punish academic dishonesty with reduced grades; apply other consequences and reassess to determine actual level of achievement.</li> <li>• Don’t consider attendance in grade determination; report absences separately.</li> <li>• Don’t include group scores in grades; use only individual achievement evidence.</li> </ul>
<b>Consistency</b>	Evidence that is low quality or poorly organized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t organize information in grading records by assessment methods or simply summarize into a single grade; organize and report evidence by standards/learning goals.</li> <li>• Don’t assign grades using inappropriate or unclear performance standards; provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations.</li> <li>• Don’t assign grades based on student’s achievement compared to other students; compare each student’s performance to preset standards.</li> <li>• Don’t rely on evidence gathered using assessments that fail to meet standards of quality; rely only on quality assessments.</li> </ul>
<b>Meaning</b>	Inappropriate number crunching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t rely only on the mean; consider other measures of central tendency and use professional judgment.</li> <li>• Don’t include zeroes in grade determination when evidence is missing or as punishment; use alternatives, such as reassessing to determine real achievement, or use “I” for Incomplete or Insufficient Evidence.</li> </ul>
<b>Supportive of Learning and Growth</b>	Measures that do not reflect growth, learning, and mastery over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t use information from formative assessments and practice to determine grades; use only summative evidence.</li> <li>• Don’t summarize evidence accumulated over time when learning is developmental and will grow with time and repeated opportunities; in those instances, emphasize more recent achievement</li> <li>• Don’t leave students out of the grading process. Involve students; they can – and should – play key roles in assessment and grading that promote achievement.</li> </ul>

**Based on:** O’Connor, Ken. *A Repair Kit for Broken Grades: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*. FIRST Educational Resources , 1 May 2022.