

How Megan Ungrades at UTK — Folder

In this attachment I include, in order, selected contents from the ungrading folder I made available to instructors at UTK:

- the “Start Here” document, which walked readers through what ungrading was and why I used it, along with answering common questions
- the ENGL 101 approach I used in Summer 2020, my first year using all labor-based grading
- the ENGL 102 approach I used in Spring 2021
- a guide to adapting the LMS for ungrading
- suggested resources

As of Summer 2023, you can find the most up-to-date version of this materials on [my public Craft site](#). The Craft site includes updated resources, along with my ungrading approach for my ENGL 295: Writing in the Workplace course.

Start Here	3
Labor-Based Grading.....	3
Collaborative rubric writing.....	4
Self-assessment and reflection	5
Revision	5
Reasons for Ungrading	6
FAQ.....	7
Don't students phone it in?	8
How does this work on Canvas?.....	9
If I want to dip my toe in the water, how can I get started?.....	9
What does this folder include?.....	10
Acknowledgements & Sources	10
ENGL 101, Summer 2020	12
Memo to Students	12
Grading Matrix.....	13
Self-Assessment.....	14
ENGL 102, Spring 2021	16
Grading Matrix.....	16
Slideshow Introducing Labor-Based Grading / Linguistic Diversity to Students	19
Rubric Generating Discussion — Secondary Source Project	19
Rubric Generating Discussion — Qualitative Project	22
Using Ungrading with an LMS.....	25
Additional Resources	28

Start Here

Welcome! My goal in sharing this folder for you is to model how I “ungrade” in the context of the first-year writing courses I teach here at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I found having examples for ungrading helpful when I started with this model, and I hope my materials will be useful to you.

By “ungrading,” I simply mean alternatives to more traditional approaches, which rely on points-and-percentages to measure how good student work is and assign a letter grade. Ungrading, instead, invites teachers to more equitable practices that encourage metacognition, engagement, risk-taking, and creativity. My own practices include labor-based grading, collaborative assessment, and self-assessment. Some scholars use “ungrading” to refer specifically to self-assessment. Here, I use “ungrading” as an umbrella term for all these practices together.

I’ve been using some version of ungrading since Summer 2019, starting small (I still graded major papers) and gradually working up towards ungrading for one major paper and then to ungrading for the whole course. You can see this progression in the sources I include; not all the material here is “full ungrading.” Along the way, I’ve gotten a feel for how different aspects of ungrading – self-assessment, collaborative rubrics, etc. – work with our program. The more I used ungrading, the more confidence I gained in this approach and its ability to support student growth. My goal is to share each aspect of ungrading, so you can see how the different components fit together for a more holistic view of an ungraded course.

My hope is that these materials are useful in helping you to envision what ungrading is and how to employ it in your own courses, even if you teach other courses, including upper division or non-writing courses. Going gradeless has benefits regardless of the particular course, and the goal of this folder is to help you imagine at least one way you could implement it. Feel free to adapt to your own circumstances.

I use three components in my ungraded courses: 1) most centrally, labor-based grading, but also 2) collaborative rubrics and 3) reflective self-assessments. The opportunity for revision also features, though it is more a practice ungrading cultivates than a piece of ungrading.

Labor-Based Grading

All I really mean by labor-based grading is this: Instead of points or percentages, I calculate students’ final grades, the thing that goes on their transcript, based on how much work they submit in the class, whether they *do* the assignments. Some labor-based grading approaches (including mine) are *unilateral*, meaning the teacher determines ahead of time how labor correlates to a particular letter grade at the end of class, while others (including those Inoue advocates for) are negotiated, developed through student input in the first week of class and sometimes open to revision throughout the semester.

For a unilateral approach like mine, the teacher will spell out what labor is required for any particular grade in a document (I call it the “grading matrix”) at the start of the term. As long as

students submit the work in the spirit that it's asked, they're recorded as turning it in, and at the end of the semester, they receive credit for turning it in. Usually there's some leeway on minor assignments; students can miss a couple homework assignments and still receive an A in the course. And of course, students need to pass all the major papers in order to pass the course!

Yet however the course is set up, the core is that the "entire range of grades" (Inoue p. 3, 2019) should be available to all students, regardless of where they come from and whether we think they're future-English-major-caliber or not. This doesn't mean that every student receives an A! Students can receive Cs, Ds, or even Fs, through lower participation in the course. But As and Bs should be within reach of everybody. (This, importantly, is a key part of what makes ungrading liberatory; by ensuring that students from across diverse racial, linguistic, or class backgrounds are able to access high grades without performing literacy practices of dominant social groups, ungrading ensures they have equal access to opportunity.)

I've placed copies of my grading matrices in the folder, along with a link to Asao Inoue's folder in the Resources document (when I was learning to ungrade, I relied on the resources available there).

One final note here: It's possible to create a *hybridized* version of labor-based grading. Especially as I got adjusted to no points or percentages, early on in the process, I created an approach where everything earned credit for submitting but the major papers. These, I continued to grade, using a rubric that emphasized the work students did on each project (e.g. cited six sources, organized the paper into at least an introduction, body, and conclusion). This hybridized model gave me time to adapt to assessment practices without points or percentages. I'd especially stress here that ungrading isn't all or nothing; there's ways to integrate elements of it into your teaching. Some is always better than none.

Collaborative rubric writing

Of the various pieces of an ungrading model, collaborative rubric writing is probably the one that is most commonly used. Here's how I make it work:

Shortly before a paper was due, I'd explain to students that I wanted their input on the rubric. That way, I told them, I could ensure that I was reading and providing feedback on their work using criteria they felt they'd learned and were able to meet (rather than criteria I *thought* I'd taught but that in fact hadn't come through clearly.) I asked them to think about everything we'd learned during the unit, then to suggest criteria for me to use in providing feedback on their paper, determining whether their paper was effective or not.

If we were face-to-face, we then had a conversation about the criteria; if we are remote, I review the criteria they've shared to the rubric generating doc. I synthesize the criteria they provide and add suggestions of my own, though as much as possible I work to retain their wording, and I hang onto an original copy of their contributions. I order the synthesized criteria into two lists, one that maps out what a *passing* project looks like and one that maps out what a *not passing*

project looks like. (My use of a pass/fail rubric, rather than a more analytic rubric, is a choice which reflects Inoue's practice.) These lists become the rubric.

While I don't "grade" student work per se, the collaboratively written rubric guides students as they complete the peer review and prepare their own project for submission. The rubric guides their self-assessment, when they submit the project, and finally, it guides me as I review projects and determine whether they do or do not pass the paper (though as much as possible, I err on the side of passing).

Self-assessment and reflection

Self-assessment is the lynchpin of my ungrading system. Self-assessment works because it includes **reflection**. Typical grading systems use grades to give students information about where their writing stands ("oh, this is B-quality work"), which can be confusing for students and squash opportunities for learning. Self-assessment asks students to give *themselves* information about their writing practices, identifying ways their writing has improved, describing how they used feedback, and generating a mental model of writing they can carry forward into new contexts. None of this happens automatically, of course. As the teacher, I provide prompts such as the template above. But **reflection is ultimately what leads to those a-ha! moments about writing** and ensures that students learn something from our courses.

Self-assessment feels a little weird at first, but ultimately, students' ability to tell what parts of their writing are effective for their purpose, genre, and audience and what parts are not is an essential part of being a good writer.

Revision

One concern I had in traditionally graded systems was that receiving an A on a paper undermined good writing practices like revision. If students' grades can't go up any more, why should they spend the time and effort to revise? But this meant that students missed out on the learning opportunities that came from making a paper better. But using labor-based approaches means that it's easier to build revision into the labor necessary for students to succeed (or to receive an A) in the course. There's two ways to do this:

Here's what I do: I build sufficient time between the crappy first draft and final project (at least a full week, more if possible) for me to **provide feedback on the crappy first draft**, not just students' peers. I also use a more robust peer reviewing model, based on Inoue's practice, that encourages students to provide really detailed feedback to each other. Since I'm no longer grading the final project, I leave less feedback on it (no need to justify a grade); and I shift my attention to giving feedback on the crappy first draft, when students can still improve. This helps students actually take my feedback and apply it to their work, getting the feel for how good writing goes through several rounds of revision.

It's also possible to couple students' grade in the class to revising at least one paper. Many ungrading / contract grading models, including Elbow's, are built within a larger portfolio

system, where it's expected that students will take a so-called "final paper" and revise it based on instructor feedback. There's no reason that a teacher couldn't make receiving an A contingent upon students revising at least one final paper, adding that into the grading matrix or other document that spells out how students' work in the course translates into a particular transcript grade.

Reasons for Ungrading

Ungrading is fairer and antiracist. Here's why:

By default, writing courses are usually set up as "points or percentage based systems," meaning that students accumulate points (sometimes within weighted categories) based on the perceived quality of their work to achieve a particular grade. The idea is that the final transcript grade measures the quality of student writing, especially as it progresses over the semester.

The problem here is that as teachers award points to student work, that process is both arbitrary (no matter how hard we try to be fair!) and high stakes. *Fairness* means that all students have equal access to all the grades (Elliot 2016); there shouldn't be a student in our class, in other words, that we expect to "only reach a C level" this semester. All students, regardless of where they're starting from, should have an equal opportunity to receive an A or a B in the course, particularly since grades make an impact on students' scholarships, their persistence towards degree, and ultimately, graduation and success beyond college (Inoue 2019).

Yet points-and-percentage based systems fall short of these ideas of fairness. Grading is often arbitrary (is a homework assignment that receives a 9/10 *really* measurably better than one that earns 7/10? What about a paper that earns an 87% versus an 85%?). Grades are also tied to factors outside of students' control, such as whether they have a massive chemistry test scheduled for the same day as one of our papers or whether they fall ill and miss a couple important classes. True, we can mitigate the impacts of these events through gracious policies, giving extensions or rounding up a grade; but the fact remains that the grading system ties students' success to factors that are ultimately unrelated to their writing skills or what they've learned in the writing course.

This is especially true for students who belong to racially or linguistically diverse groups. Judgments about what makes for "quality" writing are often tangled up with anti-Black linguistic racism (Baker-Bell 2020), the pernicious, incorrect equation of white, Mainstream English with "good" English. Especially at PWIs like the University of Tennessee, Black students or other students of color may find their home literacy practices unwelcome, which in turn leaves them without the same learning resources as white peers who are enculturated into the language of power, Mainstream English. In this way, institutional norms of tying grades to quality judgments about students' work reproduces white supremacy (Baker-Bell 2020, Inoue 2019). Since grades are linked to funding, grading the "quality" of work that Black students produces places not only their English grade but their progress towards graduation, scholarships, and other opportunities at risk.

Yet contract or ungrading decouples judgments about the quality of students' work from students' grades, making assessment **fairer and potentially anti-racist**. Students still receive feedback on their writing, whether from fellow students or teachers, ideally following Geneva Smitherman's model of focusing on the rhetorical aspects of students' work rather than perceived grammatical issues, which often have more to do with diverse Englishes than with ideas about correctness (Harris 2012). Yet any quality judgments no longer play a role in students' grade; in fact, ungrading / contract grading frees students to take risks and experiment with using their home literacy practices in academic contexts (Inoue 2019). Whatever model of ungrading a teacher chooses (there are a lot), ungrading allows students a chance to engage with the material without fear that their language practices, complex lives, or familiarity with the institution will hinder them.

Besides the big, theoretical reasons for ungrading, I have a couple super practical reasons:

1. Ungrading is more transparent and empowers students to make decisions about their grades. With point or percentage-based systems, students need to do math; we've all been asked by a student, "So how many points do I need to earn on the final paper to get an A in the class? Will 87/100 do it? Or do I need at least a 92/100?" This can be confusing for students (and their teachers!) and make it difficult for them to determine how they're progressing in the class and what effort they need to put into the course at any given point in order to achieve a certain outcome. By doing away with the need for math, ungrading helps students see where they stand in the course and gives them the agency to decide how they want to spend their time.
2. Ungrading is less stressful, both for students and teachers. The more I've leaned into ungrading, the more students have told me that it eases their anxieties about the course; they value its transparency and the cushion it provides, especially in high-stress contexts such as all-online learning or learning during a pandemic. At the same time, ungrading is less stressful for me. I still give my students *lots* of feedback, but I don't waste time anxiously trying to parse out whether a particular paper really "deserves" a B or a B+ and the ramifications of the decisions on student work. I get to *teach*, not grade.
3. Ungrading centers what we know encourages students to learn writing: metacognitive thinking, self-assessment, and revision. As students reflect on and write about the process of putting their work together and evaluate their product, they are building the roads that will enable them to carry their writing knowledge forward into other classes (see Wardle). Giving students, say, a B+ does not tell them as much about their writing and help them to learn as much as asking them to reflect on and write about their experience does. Ultimately, within an ungrading system, students become better writers.

FAQ

How do you handle late assignments?

If points or percentages are not tied to assignments, teachers lose the ability to penalize lateness by removing a certain number of those points. One of the questions teachers need to answer, then, is how to respond to late assignments.

For the most part, I don't worry about it. Assignments have a due date — or, alternatively, for a little more flexibility, “[best by](#)” dates, as Sharon Mitchler calls them — and students are encouraged to submit the project on that date. I do ask students to let me know if they plan to submit something late, and I also explain to students that submitting work late has consequences. If they submit a crappy first draft late, receiving feedback will be more difficult; if they submit a project very late, it's going to be hard to catch up or even complete the work without the support of in-class activities. But generally, there's no baked-in point-loss penalty for submitting late on papers or other major assignments; the only consequence is a natural one, getting behind, sometimes in ways that make it impossible to catch up, on the course.

In the past, I've not taken late homework; this was usually a choice I made in face-to-face classes when homework was explicitly intended to prepare students for class, and so there wasn't much point to doing it after class. Students were informed of this up front and provided a cushion, since they don't have to submit every single homework assignment to receive an A in the course. Since moving online, however, homework or other small assignments are often helpful in preparing students for larger projects, in ways that make it impossible to easily skip them. This means I now take all work late. As I return to face-to-face teaching, I may also return to not taking homework late.

You could provide a few “extra credit” homework assignments, though I prefer not to and generally, I have not found this to be a problem. (If students are missing a substantial amount of homework assignments, they're probably missing a lot of other things too.)

Don't students phone it in?

Not in my experience. Partly, I chalk this up to the fact that students really do want to learn, especially when we remove some of the more punitive parts of education, the grades. Partly, the reinforcements we build into the ungrading system (such as rubric-generating sessions and students submitting a reflection identifying the strengths/areas for improvement in their work) structure their experience in ways that prompt them to do well.

Still, most versions of labor-based grading specify that to count as submitted, to count for credit, students' work needs to be submitted in good faith and/or in the spirit it's asked for. If a student turns in two paragraphs, you can ask her to revise.

Doesn't ungrading reward students who don't put in sufficient effort?

Closely related to the concern about students phoning it in are concerns that ungrading may enable students to *get away with stuff*. Yes, the question goes, flexible deadlines and completion-based grading may provide a cushion for students with complex lives, but don't those same features fail to enforce rigor for students who may otherwise procrastinate, misuse extensions, or otherwise fail to submit creative, critical work?

Perhaps. Yet to some degree, it doesn't matter. I am a teacher, not a cop. Ungrading asks us as teachers to rethink our role in the classroom. Rather than being arbiters of student behavior, deciding who "deserves" an extension or whether a paper "deserves" an A- versus a B+, we as teachers are called to cultivate a classroom ecology which fosters learning and creativity. That is impossible to do if we're still trying to make calls about who gets the benefit of extra flexibility. We can commit to methods of assessment that don't make students fit oppressive institutional norms, or not, but making that commitment holds us to stop policing *all* our students.

Second, this concern persists in traditional, grade-based systems. We have all had students who've knocked out an A paper the night before it's due, or students who (on the other hand) work tirelessly at improving their writing but are unable to bring it up to where they want. Ungrading, by honestly acknowledging that grades do not map neatly onto students' learning or effort, allows us to (re)consider what our courses actually measure (Schwarz 2020) and to open the range of grades to students with diverse language and learning resources, rather than just those who fit a particular model.

How does this work on Canvas?

Canvas, unfortunately, is set up in a way that makes points-and-percentage based systems "fit" better with its interface. That said, it is possible to make Canvas work. Here's what I do:

- Everything is marked complete / incomplete. Some people also find it helpful to click the "this assignment does not count for the final grade" box.
- Assignments are divvied into groups based on what is on the matrix (e.g. an assignment group for homework, an assignment group for major papers).
- At the end of the semester, I tally up what students have completed in each category, then assign the transcript grade based on how their work compares to the matrix.

I also make sure to 1) check in with students regularly about their progress on the grading matrix, often at midterms and again at finals, 2) I provide students an Excel sheet to help them track their own grade, and 3) I post final transcript grades to Canvas (in a separate assignment called "final grades") before I post them to Banner, so that if students have questions, they can reach out to me.

One other note: It's possible to finish the semester (and in fact, I think I'll be doing this myself) by asking students to use the grading matrix you created, whether unilaterally or collaboratively, to assess what grade they are getting in the class. Especially for students whose work over the course of the semester seems to straddle the line between two transcript grades, having a conversation about what grade ends up on their transcript can be a good way to ensure that the grades accurately reflect students' perception of their learning in the course this semester.

If I want to dip my toe in the water, how can I get started?

One thing that I want to stress is that there's *no one way to do ungrading*. There are many ways, and you can choose the ones that work best for your pedagogical approach!

For me, I liked starting with a hybridized system, where the only thing I was still grading was the major papers (using a special rubric which minimized arbitrary points and subjective assessment.) This streamlined the grading process, making it more transparent and accessible for students, while providing me and my students with some sense of normalcy. As I used this system, I gained confidence that ungrading would not demotivate students and would be widely acceptable, and I felt ready to move to a more holistic ungrading system subsequently.

You could also practice ungrading by 1) Incorporating self-assessment following assignments, 2) Collaboratively writing rubrics with students, 3) Using minimal grades (e.g. A, B, etc), instead of arbitrary point-based assignments (32/35); and 4) Using ungrading for a few assignments (sometimes early assignments, as students get used to the course; or later, high-stakes assignments). See Elbow's work for more information on the last two.

What does this folder include?

Virginia Schwarz (2020) notes that most contract grading models include

- A memo to students
- A grading contract or matrix, some way of reaching a transcript grade
- Other assessment features (e.g. labor logs, self-assessment, etc)

In this light, each section includes at minimum my grading matrix. Semesters beyond that one also include a memo to students and self-assessment directions. In the Fall 2020 document, I also include the directions for collaborative rubric writing, tailored to the all-online Covid modality.

Because I taught myself to ungrade over this period of time, the documents show my progression in how I conceive of and enact ungrading, with more documents and resources available for each course. Nevertheless, I include all these materials as a way of envisioning how somebody might get started with ungrading. Starting slow with ungrading gave me confidence and clarity in how I wanted to move forward with it, and I encourage you to borrow from my early models if that helps you.

Acknowledgements & Sources

I want to thank all the teachers who willingly shared their own ungrading resources online, on social media, or as part of other collections, especially Jennifer Eidum, Asao Inoue, and Jesse Stommel. Their work was helpful in guiding my creation of the grading matrixes, peer reviews, and self-assessments. In the spirit of that generosity, please feel free to borrow and adapt anything you find in the folder.

Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice*, Routledge, 2020.

Danielewicz, Jane and Peter Elbow. "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no 2, 2009, pp. 244-268.

Elbow, Peter. "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting out Three Forms of Judgment." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 2, Feb. 1993, p. 187, <https://doi.org/10.2307/378503>.

Elliot, Norbert. "A Theory of Ethics for Writing Assessment," *A Theory of Ethics for Writing Assessment*, special issue of *Journal for Writing Assessment*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2016, <http://journalofwritingassessment.org/archives.php?issue=19>

Inoue, Asao. [*Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*](#), WAC Clearinghouse, 2019.

--. "Self-Assessment as Programmatic Center: The First Year Writing Program and Its Assessment at California State University, Fresno" *Ecologies of Writing Programs: Program Profiles in Context*, edited by Mary Jo Reiff et al, *Parlor Press*, 2015.

Kohn, Alfie. "The Trouble with Rubrics," *English Journal*, vol. 95, no. 4, March 2006, <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/trouble-rubrics/>.

Litterio, Lisa M. "Contract Grading in the Technical Writing Classroom: Blending Community-Based Assessment and Self-Assessment." *Assessing Writing*, vol. 38, Oct. 2018, pp. 1–9. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:[10.1016/j.asw.2018.06.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2018.06.002).

Perryman-Clark, Staci. "Who We Are(n't) Assessing: Racializing Language and Writing Assessment in Writing Program Administration," *Toward Writing Assessment as Social Justice*, special issue of *College English* vol. 79, no 2, Nov. 2016, pp. 206-211.

Poe, Maya, Asao Inoue, and Norbert Elliot. "[Introduction: the End of Isolation](#)." *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*, WAC Clearinghouse, 2018, pp. 3-38.

Schwarz, Virginia M. *(De)Norming Classroom Merit: Grading Contracts as an Assessment Genre*. University of Wisconsin, Madison, 3 Aug. 2020. Dissertation.

Stommell, Jesse. "How to Ungrade," *Jesse Stommell*. <https://www.jessestommel.com/how-to-ungrade/>

--. "Ungrading: a FAQ." <https://www.jessestommel.com/ungrading-an-faq/>

--. "Why I Don't Grade." <https://www.jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/>

Wardle, Elizabeth. "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study," *WPA*, vol. 31, iss. 1-2, Fall/Winter 2007, pp. 65-85.

ENGL 101, Summer 2020

This document includes materials for ENGL 101, Summer 2020, including a memo to students, a grading matrix, and a self-assessment.

Memo to Students

Starting in Summer 2020, I created a document separate from my syllabus to explain ungrading to students. This usually appears in Canvas as an external link to a Google doc, titled “How Grades Work” or “Why Ungrading.” For Summer 2020, this was the language I used:

[Note: this is how I’d frame contract grading to students. They receive some version of this in writing, and if we have time to meet face-to-face or synchronously via Zoom, in a conversation.]

What’s up with the grading policy?

You may notice the part of the syllabus that talks about grading looks a little different than you’re used to. There’s no indication of how many points, or what percentage of your grade, each paper is worth.

So how is your grade determined? This is a great question. Here’s the answer.

Your grade is determined by your work in the course – in other words, the work you complete.

Do the work, and you’ll get a strong grade in the course. How “good” I think your paper is does not factor into your grade at all. While this approach has a number of names, I call it ***ungrading***.

Here’s how ungrading works:

You’ll still get lots of coaching on how to make your writing as effective as possible. As you plan, research, and draft your writing, I’ll read it and give you feedback. You’ll get feedback from your classmates. You’ll use feedback to revise your paper. You’ll also spend a lot of time thinking about what makes your paper effective. Before you turn in a paper, we’ll discuss as a class what makes that paper effective. When you turn the paper in, you’ll include a reflection that describes the work you did on the paper and how your work made it more effective. All of this effort – the coaching, the feedback, the reflections, etc – help you learn and become a stronger writer!

You just won’t get a *grade* on your paper – say, an 87% or 92/100 points, which always winds up feeling a little arbitrary and subjective. Instead of points or percentages, as long as you put in a good-faith effort, you get full credit for submitting each project, crappy draft, and homework assignment.

Here’s why I use ungrading:

As a teacher, I try really hard to be fair. I want everybody to have the best chance possible to succeed in this class. Ungrading, which focuses on whether you're turning work in and participating in the course rather than on subjective judgments about the quality of your work, is the fairest option.

I also want you to learn. Weirdly, focusing on grades (what you need to do to get an A in the course) makes you less likely to actually learn during the course, as this essay [demonstrates](#)! Additionally, research shows that students from privileged backgrounds (e.g. white, middle-class students who have traditionally thrived in school) [receive higher grades](#) than students from minoritized backgrounds, so removing grades is a way to ensure that *everybody* thrives. That means, if you've always felt nervous or lacked confidence in your writing, or if you're worried about learning to write online, or if you've always gotten As and are nervous about keeping up a high GPA — don't be nervous! You'll be able to take risks, try new ways of writing, and get better without worrying about your grade. Do your work, keep up with the class, and the grade will follow.

Ungrading also makes it easier for you to tell what your grade is in the class at any given time. Instead of doing the math to figure out (for example) whether receiving 90 points out of a 100 on the third paper will be enough for you to get an A in the course, you simply have to keep track of what you do, checking your work off the list. As long as you're doing what the grading matrix spells out, you're getting that grade; there's no math required!

But doesn't a grade show up on my transcript at the end of the semester?

Yep. That grade is solely determined by the work you complete for the course. You can see on the matrix below / syllabus how your work in the course "translates" into a particular grade. Keep in mind that as I explained above, as long as you turn in a good-faith effort, you get full credit for turning work in.

Grading Matrix

This is the final grading matrix provided to my ENGL 101 students during Summer 2020.

For an A, you will	For a B, you will	For a C, you will
Pass three (3) major projects (CRA, APP, & MM), along with a reflection for each Contribute thoughtfully to a criteria-generating discussion board for each major project.	Pass three (3) major projects, at least two (2) with reflections Contribute thoughtfully to at least two of the criteria-generating discussion boards for the three major projects.	Pass three (3) major projects Contribute to one criteria-generating discussion board.

For an A, you will	For a B, you will	For a C, you will
Submit a crappy first draft on time for each major project and provide thoughtful feedback for your peer review partner(s)	Submit at least two of the three crappy first drafts and provide feedback for your peer review partner(s).	Submit at least one crappy first draft.
You submit at least 5 out of the 6 homework assignments.	You submit at least 4 out of the 6 homework assignments.	You submit at least 3/6 homework assignments.
You submit all 3 quizzes.	You submit 2 out of 3 quizzes.	You submit 1 quiz.
You attend at least 7 out of 8 Zoom work sessions.	You attend at least 6 out of 8 Zoom work sessions.	You attend at least 4 out of 8 Zoom work sessions.

See notes on the next page.

- Zoom work sessions are a little like attendance. By showing up to Zoom, you're able to engage in the activities that will help you learn. However, also like class, you may not always be able to attend. Maybe you come down with a bug, maybe the Internet goes out at your house, etc. If you're not able to attend a Zoom session, just let me know! I don't need to know the reason, I just need to hear from you, and I'll be happy to excuse your absence. (Unexcused absences, where you don't show up at all and never talk to me about it, will count against the grade.)
- If your work is spread across two columns, you'll receive a grade with a plus or a minus. So for example, if you submit most of your work (all the papers, peer reviews, etc, but you only submit one quiz and four homework assignments), you'll receive an A-.
- To *pass* the papers, you simply submit them in the spirit they're asked for. This means that you put in the effort you're expected to put in for that project. A few examples:
 - If the paper is supposed to be four pages long, yours is about four pages, not ½ a page.
 - If the paper requires five sources, you include five quality sources, not Wikipedia.
 - If the paper is meant to be a multimodal / digital project, you turn in an infographic, not a few photos on a Power Point slide.

For the most part, as long as you turn in a good-faith effort, you'll pass each paper. We'll work together to create a rubric for each assignment to help you see what a good faith effort looks like. If for some reason your paper looks nothing like expectations and you don't pass, you'll have a chance to revise the paper and resubmit to pass. Do your best, and things will be okay.

Self-Assessment

Along with your CRE, you'll submit a reflective self-assessment, in which you'll discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your writing process and of the final product, using the rubric developed from our criteria generating session as a guide. Your reflective self-assessment will help you learn more about your own writing practices, and it will help make a case for the strengths of your paper.

How do I complete my self-evaluation? Simply answer the following questions about your paper:

1. Evaluate your work on the **writing process**: reading the articles and analyzing their rhetorical choices, writing the crappy first draft, and responding to peer feedback. What aspects of the writing process were strongest, or helped to produce a paper you're proud of? What aspects of your writing process need more work? How did your understanding of the writing process change from the beginning to the end of the project?
2. Now, evaluate your work on the **written paper**. Does your comparative rhetorical analysis have an introduction with a thesis statement, body, and a conclusion? Does it quote from both articles? Does it compare the two articles use logos, pathos, and ethos and show which article is more effective? Does it describe logos, pathos, and ethos accurately? Overall, what aspects of your paper are the strongest? What aspects probably need more work? How did your work evolve from its earliest drafts to the final project?
3. Would you say that this paper passes the assignment or not? Why? Draw on your answers for the previous two questions here; you can also discuss how your paper "lines up" with what we learned about rhetoric and writing, through the readings/videos provided?
4. Do you have anything else you want me to know about your project?

You can simply answer these questions in the order they're provided. No need to be fancy.

Other tips:

- To evaluate your work, you may want to refer to 1) the readings/videos provided throughout the unit or 2) the peer feedback you received and changes you made. Evaluating your work based on the material you provided will give you a chance to see what you've learned during this unit, and help me see where your ideas are coming from.
- If possible, use specific quotes/ details from your writing to "show" me what you're proud of.
- Feel free to share anything you want with me about the experience of writing your paper. Did writing the paper line up with your expectations or challenge them? What did you like or find confusing about this paper? **What are you specifically proud of?** Online learning can be hard – use this space to celebrate your victories!

How long should this be? Aim for one single-spaced page or so. If you've written less than that, you probably haven't written enough.

ENGL 102, Spring 2021

This semester, the big change that I made was introducing discussions of linguistic diversity into the coursework. I teach at a primarily white university (PWI), yet of course, Black students, Latinx students, and students of other raciolinguistic backgrounds regularly enroll, as do white students who use vernaculars such as Appalachian English. In light of this context, my goal was to help students see language patterns, and the judgments we make about language patterns, as connected to race, ethnicity, gender, and other parts of identity. As Inoue writes in *Antiracist Assessment Ecologies*, “students don’t have to label the differences they notice in language practices as racialized, but they can strive to understand the differences as more than idiosyncrasies, more than individual differences unconnected to larger discursive fields, larger social and cultural practices in their lives” (83).

I chose to explicitly incorporate discussion of linguistic diversity in response to students’ reactions last semester to the rubric generating discussions. Then, asked to invent criteria for each paper, a few named correct grammar as crucial to a passing paper, or major grammar errors as characteristic of a failing one. On the one hand, such responses are understandable, as students have been warned for more than a decade against grammar errors. On the other, I was concerned that the collaborative rubric, a tool I’d intended to be liberatory, not wind up “ask[ing] students to approximate the academic dispositions of the academy” (Inoue 19) and of standardized English, without critical evaluation of such requirements.

Each rubric generating discussion, then, asks students to describe characteristics of an effective assignment, based on what we’ve discussed. But each discussion also asks students to read a text on linguistic diversity and reflect on their own language habits in the context of identity and larger social patterns. I’ve placed additional texts for these readings in the resources document of this folder [hyperlink removed]. I’ve placed two rubric generating discussion prompts (out of three in the class as a whole) below, along with the grading matrix and a reflective self-assessment for the other two key pieces of my ungrading practice. I hope the models are useful to you, but please feel free to reach out if you have questions.

Grading Matrix

As long as you complete each project in the spirit that it’s asked, you will receive credit for it and pass the class. **Try hard, don’t be afraid to try new things, and you’ll learn a lot!**

For an A, you will	For a B, you will	For a C, you will	For a D, you will
Pass all three papers (the secondary source project, the qualitative research paper, and the archival project). Submit a thorough,	Pass all three papers (the secondary source project, the qualitative research paper, and the archival project). Submit a thorough self-	Pass all three papers (the secondary source project, the qualitative research paper, and the archival project). Submit a self-	Pass two of the three papers assigned.

For an A, you will	For a B, you will	For a C, you will	For a D, you will
insightful self-assessment with each one.	assessment with at least two of the three assignments.	assessment with at least one assignment.	
Submit a crappy first draft for each of the three projects and make notable revisions to all three prior to submitting the final paper / project.	Submit a crappy first draft for at least two projects and make noticeable revisions to both prior to submitting the final paper / project.	Submit one crappy first draft and make noticeable revisions to it prior to submitting the final.	You do not submit any crappy first drafts OR your crappy first drafts are identical or nearly identical with the final.
Provide on-time peer review feedback to an assigned classmate for ea. of the three papers.	Provide on-time peer review feedback to an assigned classmate for two papers.	Provide on-time peer review feedback to an assigned classmate for one project.	You do not provide on-time feedback to your classmates.
Participate in all three rubric development discussions.	Participate in two rubric development discussions.	Participate in one rubric development discussion.	You do not participate in rubric development discussions.
Pass at least 90% of homework assignments (approx. 16+)	Pass at least 80% of homework assignments.	Pass at least 60% of homework assignments.	Pass 50% of homework assignments.
You show up prepared and on time for two conferences with me and participate in the session w/ a librarian.	You show up for two conferences w/ me OR You show up for one conf. & participate in the librarian session.	You show up for at least one conference with me OR the session with the librarian.	You miss your conferences with me.
You submit your initial lifeway story and your reflective lifeway story.	You submit your initial lifeway story and your reflective lifeway story.	You submit your reflective lifeway story.	You do not submit your initial or your reflective lifeway story.

Notes

- **How do I earn a particular grade?** Simply complete the tasks listed in that grade column! For instance, if you want an A in the course, you should complete the

assignments listed under the “If you want an A” column. As we work through the semester, I will highlight what you’ve completed on a personalized version of the matrix, to chart where you stand in the course.

- What if my work ends up being spread across two columns? That’s where pluses and minuses come from.
 - Complete some of the tasks in the “A” column and some in the “B” column? You will earn a plus or a minus, depending on how many tasks you completed in each column.
 - More tasks completed in the A column and a few in the B column would mean an A-
 - More tasks completed in the B column and a few in the A column would mean a B+.
- **How do I know if I’m passing each paper?** We’ll work together to generate a rubric for each assignment. But generally speaking, you can count on passing if you submit each paper in the spirit they’re asked for. A couple examples: If the paper requires four pages, yours is about four pages, not half a page. If the paper requires five sources, you have five sources, not three and one from Wikipedia.
- **What if I don’t pass a paper?** Don’t panic! I will give you feedback, and you may revise it for full credit. Do your best, and things will be okay.
- **What if I don’t get a crappy first draft submitted in time for peer feedback?** After the deadline for submitting the crappy first draft, you will not be able to receive peer feedback. However, you can get feedback / get credit for the peer review assignment by setting up a one-on-one meeting with a tutor at the writing center.
- **Late work:** Remember, I take late work for credit, with the exception of peer reviews. If you somehow miss an assignment, you’re welcome to submit it late, and I will grade it. As always, though, keep in mind that submitting work after its “best by” date may create a backlog that makes it hard to keep up with subsequent assignments.
- **How will this look on Canvas?** I am strongly convinced this method of grading is fairer, less stressful, and more transparent (no math!), so I stick with it. Unfortunately, Canvas is based on educational models which insist that the quality of your writing can be arbitrarily quantified and doesn’t play well with this method of grading. To see where you stand overall, consult the matrix above. To see what assignments you have completed, consult the gradebook in Canvas. All assignments besides homework will be complete/incomplete: you will see a checkmark indicating assignments you have completed and an X indicating incomplete assignments. Homework will be assigned 1 point, so that you can easily keep track of the number of homework assignments you’ve done (simply add up the points!).

Slideshow Introducing Labor-Based Grading / Linguistic Diversity to Students

As part of my work to more explicitly engage with questions of linguistic diversity, I addressed the connection between labor-based grading and linguistic diversity during the first class session, as part of our justification for labor-based grading. You can see a version of the slideshow here [Note: Because this is a public-facing document, I have removed the hyperlink to the slideshow.

During our first session, I aimed to

- Connect with students' perceptions of grades as creating anxiety and interfering with their writing process, a strategy I learned from Jesse Stommel's work
- Provide students a history of how grades have been used for discrimination and criticism
- Generate positive feelings about the way ungrading allows for both room for growth and the possibility to be themselves in their writing

In keeping with [research](#) that shows diversity initiatives are often framed in terms of their benefits, rather than their moral imperative, I wanted to stress that ungrading was a justice choice, as well as a choice that I felt would help students learn.

Rubric Generating Discussion — Secondary Source Project

As you know, your grade in this course comes from *completion*: Do the work (good-faith effort), and you will get credit for the task. I will give you plenty of feedback about how to make your writing more effective, I will ask you to tell me about how effective it is, but I will not give it a grade based on my subjective assessment of how effective it is (e.g. a B-).

My goal isn't for you to become the kind of writer who can write "what the teacher wants." **My goal for you is to become a writer who can make savvy, purposeful choices about your writing**, which will serve you better in the long run at college and beyond.

One part of making (or learning to make) these choices about your writing **is describing what counts as a "good" example of the paper you're currently writing** — in this case, a literature review, whether you chose the written option or the Prezi option, with an annotated bibliography but later this semester, a qualitative research paper and an archival project.

If you were learning basketball, at some point you should be able to tell your coach what makes a good layup different than a poor layup; you should know what moves the layup makes and work towards them. **Same thing for writing**: You should know what "moves" make for an effective "annotated bibliography plus" and be able to move towards them. You should also be able to discuss how these "moves" work given your own ways of using language/writing,

So here's what you'll do for now.

Before you meet with your group,

- Watch this video, [Sociolinguistics Crash Course](#), which describes how language varies based on people's identity

- Take this (fun) quiz, Y'all, You'se, and You Guys [Note: As of Fall 2022, the New York Times quiz has been paywalled. Accordingly, I have removed the link].

In the video, the speaker describes the way that language varies across different places and people groups, and she says that she uses language differently, to express different parts of her identity as a “20-something, college-educated, multiracial, queer woman.” How does your language and writing reflect the various parts of who you are — your ethnicity, geographic location, gender, religion, age, etc? What are some ways that you think you use language differently than people who are not from the same places in life as you? Also, think about people who come from places or groups in life that may make them more likely to use more variants, as the video describes: how do you think these people feel about hard-and-fast rules about “good” writing? Write a 150ish word reflection that answers these questions. Save it.

Then, meet with your group. You can meet via any platform you want — GroupMe, Facetime, Zoom, etc. Bring your reflection with you.

Using your reflections as a springboard, think about the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the literature review + annotated bibliography? What do you want readers to take away from reading it?
- Who do you envision reading and benefiting from this material? Be more specific than, “anybody who happens across it.” You could write for a typically academic audience, but you don’t have to. Imagine who might have a stake in this project. If you’re from Appalachia and you’re writing about country churches in Appalachia, you might want your research to be read by other Appalachians.
- Now, put together your thoughts about your purpose + audience + your own ways of using language, based on who you are and where you come from (refer back to your reflection). What are some valid ways to present yourself in this project, outside of what we usually think of as “good grammar” or “academic writing”? What are some ways that you could use grammar, word choices, organization, citation practices in ways that reflect who you are and where you come from, and who your audience is?
- How do your answers vary based on whether you choose the Prezi or written option? How would your answers be the same?

One of your group members should write down your answers to these as you discuss them. They don’t need to be super tidy, but I should be able to tell what you talked about.

You will **submit your reflection + your group notes** (the group notes can be identical, copy-and-paste what your notetaker wrote, giving credit to the person who took notes) **on Canvas**. That way, I can see what you talked about and how your conversation affected your input on the rubric.

Last, using your answers above to guide you, **work with your group to decide what qualities make for an effective (passing) literature review + annotated bibliography?** What qualities make for an ineffective (not passing) one? Add your responses in the chart below. While it’s

okay to repeat some of your classmates' comments a little, aim to add something new to the discussion as well.

Hint: You may also want to go back through what you've read, watched, and completed during this unit (since late January/early February), referring to things like

- the project directions
- the literature review/annotated bibliography examples
- readings on how to conduct research
- readings on citation and annotation

Write your response in the chart below:

- Include your name after your response (so I can give you credit).
- Get beyond spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. There are more important things! :)

Once you've finished responding, I will synthesize your comments into a rubric, that you can use to guide you as you finish the project and complete your self-assessment.

Also, don't forget to submit 1) your reflection and 2) your notes from your group discussion on Canvas.

Rubric Chart

A secondary source project that <i>passes</i> the assignment	A secondary source project that does <i>not pass</i> the assignment
Is written in Vol Orange font (Megan) • Includes sources from the library database	

A passing secondary project is one that

- Is written in Vol Orange font
- Includes sources from the library database
- Has an introduction and a conclusion to guide the reader thru the paper
- Includes a Works Cited

A not passing secondary project is one that

- Is written in a color other than Vol Orange font
- Does not include library sources

Rubric Generating Discussion — Qualitative Project

As you know, your grade in this course comes from *completion*: Do the work (good-faith effort), and you will get credit for the task. I will give you plenty of feedback about how to make your writing more effective, I will ask you to tell me about how effective it is, but I will not give it a grade based on my subjective assessment of how effective it is (e.g. a B-).

My goal isn't for you to become the kind of writer who can write "what the teacher wants." **My goal for you is to become a writer who can make savvy, purposeful choices about your writing**, which will serve you better in the long run at college and beyond.

One part of making (or learning to make) these choices about your writing **is describing what counts as a "good" example of the paper you're currently writing** — in this case, an extended annotated bibliography but later this semester, a qualitative research paper and an archival project.

If you were learning basketball, at some point you should be able to tell your coach what makes a good layup different than a poor layup; you should know what moves the layup makes and work towards them. **Same thing for writing**: You should know what "moves" make for an effective "annotated bibliography plus" and be able to move towards them.

Go ahead and write your answer to the first two questions on a separate document (you can make a copy of this document or just submit directly to Canvas, whatever is easiest). Your answer to the third question goes in the shareable chart.

You need to complete all three questions — which are all important to helping you define what an *effective* project looks like for you — to receive credit for the discussion.

1. Read through this short (about 3 pages) excerpt from one of Vershawn Ashanti Young's essays, in which he talks about the value of "code-meshing." [Note: Excerpt removed, but it's from the essay, "Should Writers Use They Own English."] When you're done, reflect. a) How would you describe code-meshing, based on dr. vay's essay? b) Why is it important? c) What are some ways that you "code-mesh" in your own writing? Put another way, how do you write in ways that blend your ideas about being "professional" with writing that connects to who you are and where you come from? For this last question, you may want to think / look back to your response for the first rubric-writing discussion, about how your language is connected to identity. (100ish words)
2. Now, think about your qualitative project. Who do you envision reading / benefiting from this project, besides me? What kinds of writing choices or styles do you think your audience would benefit from? In what ways might you blend more formal and more vernacular (informal) language in your essay, to get at who you are / where you come from and who your readers are / where they come from? (100ish words)
3. Now, put your responses above together with what you've learned about qualitative research and writing. For you, **what qualities contribute to a compelling, effective qualitative research project?** What qualities would characterize an ineffective project?

In answering these question, you may want to go back through

- the project directions
- readings on how to conduct qualitative research
- readings on the IMRAD format
- my feedback on your work for this unit

Write your answer to this question in the editable chart (Rubric Chart) below.

- Include your name after your response (so I can give you credit).
- Please avoid repeating something classmates have said.
- Get beyond spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. There are more important things! :)

Once you’ve finished responding, I will synthesize your comments into a rubric, that you can use to guide you as you finish the project and complete your self-assessment.

Rubric Chart

A qualitative project that <i>passes</i> the assignment	A qualitative project that does <i>not pass</i> the assignment
---	--

Reflective Self-Assessment

Along with your finished project, you’ll submit a reflective self-assessment, in which you’ll discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your writing process and of the final product, using the rubric developed from our rubric generating session as a guide.

Writing a reflective self-assessment will 1) help you learn more about your own writing practices and 2) make a case for the strengths of your paper, as I read it.

Tips:

- If possible, use specific quotes/ details from your writing to “show” me what you’re proud of.
- Focus on reflecting on your experience of researching and writing this project, not on evaluating how the class activities worked. While I’m always happy to get feedback about how the class is going, you learn more when you write about what you thought, did, and learned. I’ve designated a particular question (#6) for you to share anything you want me to know about how the activities worked.
- It’s okay to identify things that were hard for you or things you still find confusing. But it’s also okay to identify parts of your writing that you are **specifically proud of**. Online learning can be hard – use this space to celebrate your victories!
- **Aim for about one, single-spaced page or a little more.** If you write much less, you probably haven’t written enough to fully represent how you wrote, and to learn from the activity; and I may ask you to resubmit to receive credit.

Note: Please take your time and don't rush through this. The reflective self-assessment should be thoughtful and specific, giving in-depth answers about how your project relates to the rubric and what you learned. Because the self-assessment is important to your learning, you may be asked to redo it if it is short or lacks details.

How do I complete my self-evaluation? Simply answer the following questions about your paper:

1. Describe how you went about **researching** this topic. **How did it go for you?** You may want to consider what strategies you learned for locating database sources, how your topic (and your own views about the topic!) shifted as you conducted research, how you went about writing annotations, and how you saved and organized your research. What aspects of the research process were strongest, or helped to produce a paper you're proud of? What aspects of your writing process need more work? How did your understanding of the research process change from the beginning to the end of the project? (Approx 150 words)
2. Now, describe how you went about **writing the paper**. **How do you feel about the finished product?** You may want to consider questions such as how you connected sources to come up with your points, how you located and built in quotations, how you decided on your organization for the topic, and how you introduced and concluded the project? Overall, what aspects of your paper are the strongest? What aspects probably need more work? How did your work evolve from its earliest drafts to the final project? (Approx 150 words)
3. Describe how your work changed from **crappy first draft** to the **final product**. In what specific ways did you incorporate feedback from your peer review partner, and/or feedback from me, into your final draft? How would you say the changes make your writing more readable? (Approx. 150 words)
4. Would you say that this paper passes the assignment or not? Why? Refer to our rubric here to show how your paper "lines up" with what academic research papers are meant to turn out looking like. Also refer to your answers for the previous three questions. (Approx 100 words)
5. Do you have anything else you want me to know about your project?
6. Do you have anything you want me to know about this unit (e.g. what activities worked or didn't work, what questions you have, etc?)

You can simply answer these questions in the order they're provided. No need to be fancy.

Using Ungrading with an LMS

Unsurprisingly, online learning management platforms are not well designed for an ungrading model. Most platforms prefer weighted averages. Still, you can usually make ungrading work on them. Here's what works for me. I appreciate other teachers who shared their methods, especially on social media, and I draw from that here.

To start with, especially if you use an institutionally-designed template or syllabus, **you'll may want to make a few changes**. These may include

- **Deleting any category or assignment weights.** LMSes already do a poor job of guessing what students' grades are within a labor-based model, and assignment weights will make it more difficult. (If you're on Canvas, here's how you do this: Click under "Assignments," choose the vertical three dots on the right-hand side of the page, and uncheck "weight assignments.")
- **Designating your assignments as "complete/incomplete" or as 1 point/0 points** (see below for rationale), rather than, say, 10 or 100 points. (Under a labor-based model, you're probably not using points any more, or perhaps only to mark completion.) You can make these changes in assignment design. A few people who are new to labor-based grading choose to still grade papers using a labor-based matrix for the assignment (e.g. students get an A if they complete all the lead-up assignments, a B if they complete most of them, etc.). If you do this, you'll want to set the assignments to display "letter grades" and change the points to "zero".
- **Delete standard syllabus language connecting percentages or points to letter grades** (e.g. 93-100% = A, 90-92.9% = A-). Most likely, if you're using labor-based grading, you won't have percentages or numbers in the class. Keeping this language in could confuse students. (If you feel the need to keep it for institutional documentation, tuck it away in an appendix or at the bottom of the document.)
- **Consider hiding the "total grades" from students.** This is not something I've chosen to do, but some people prefer to do it, since the LMS's guess at the final or total grade is often inaccurate or hard to read. If you're on Canvas and the system administrator permits it (they do at my institution), you can do that following these [directions](#). You may want to make this choice in coordination with providing students an alternative way to track their grades. Some people provide students their own copy of the grading matrix and show how to fill them out; some people provide students a checklist using Google Sheets, etc.

Naturally, you'll want to make the choices that work best for your own goals as a teacher, your program, and your students. I recommend the bullet points above since they help convert your LMS from a conventional, points-or-percentage based system to one that works for labor-based grading.

More broadly, as you rework your LMS to a labor-based approach, you might consider a combination of creative LMS design and open communication with students.

Creative LMS design:

I use Canvas, and here's what's worked for me, though I do want to note that many of these suggestions, I came up with by talking with fellow educators, both in person and on social media, specifically Twitter. The post is lost to time, though please contact me if you recognize your contribution in here and want credit — I'd be more than happy to tag you!

- Robust use of “assignment groups.” At the start of the semester, I create a series of assignment groups that align with my grading matrix: for instance, a separate group for homework, peer reviews, crappy first drafts, and final projects. Then, by showing students' grades organized by assignment group, I can more easily track which assignments students have and have not completed. Students also should be able to see this, though they may need training in easily reading it.
- Complete/incomplete grading. I use “complete” when a student submits a passing project; incomplete, when the project is submitted by does not yet pass (e.g. a secondary source research project without the required number of database sources). Completes/incompletes show up as check marks and Xs, so students are easily able to see what they have or have not yet completed.
- Homework worth one (1) point. Usually, my grading matrix asks students to complete a certain number of homework assignments for a transcript grade (e.g. 15/20 for an A; 13/20 for a B), so by making each homework assignment worth one point, it's easy to tell at a glance how many homework assignments students have completed. Still, one downside here is that Canvas translates the points into percentages, so a student who completes all the homework but misses the papers will show up in Canvas as receiving a 100% in the course.
- Checking the “Do not count this assignment toward the final grade” in the “assignments” option should prevent Canvas from calculating the percentage total described above. Checking this box on every homework assignment in particular could be a way to shape how Canvas displays students' grades. I prefer not to check this box, but many people do keep it checked.

Open communication with students

However well you design your course on Canvas, there will be some gaps, so talking with students about the grading policies is also important.

- Most importantly, **talk to students up front and in person / synchronously if possible** about labor-based grading or ungrading: what it is, why you're doing it, how they get an A (or other grades) in the course, and how they can keep track of where they stand. Students will generally get on board if you're on board and you tell them why; they appreciate (as we all do!) knowing that they're not going to be unpleasantly surprised at the end of the term. You could even model for students how a “sample” filled-out grading matrix would relate to the grade.
- Teach students how to use the grading matrix to keep track of their own grade. One of the benefits of ungrading is its transparency; students don't need to make guesses anymore

about the number of points they need on homework assignments to move their grade from, say, a 90% to a 93% in the course. So, you could encourage students to **make a copy of the grading matrix** and use it to track their standing in the course; this in turn gives students the feeling of agency over their grade, the ability to make choices that lead to the outcome they want.

- Relatedly, teach students how to read your LMS. I warn mine that the LMS “gets confused” by our system and that while they can use it to see what they have done / not done, they should not rely on its final grade.
- **Check in with students** regularly. I like to have a midterm conference with students, where I show them how their work thus far in the semester produces a particular grade on the grading matrix, though if you’re concerned about whether students will understand and adapt to the ungrading system, earlier conferences are possible. Other educators also have a final conference, where students and teachers alike use the grading matrix to agree on a transcript grade for students.
- This includes, incidentally, checking in with students who stop submitting work. If you’re like me, you probably check in with students anyway; but since students who are missing a lot of work are missing the labor that translates into a grade at the end of term, it’s never a bad idea to loop back around and see what’s going on with someone who has apparently checked out.

If you discover a new approach with online learning management systems that works for you, I’d love to hear about it! Please contact me at [UTK email here] to add it to the list.

Additional Resources

I've included resources to help you 1) design your own ungraded or labor-based graded course, 2) talk about linguistic diversity with students, and 3) work through emerging critiques of labor-based grading. Got an addition? Feel free to contact me, and I'll add it to the list.

Why alternative assessments? How can I build one?

I started with Asao Inoue's work on labor-based grading contracts, which I follow closely but not exactly. His resources are helpful, especially:

- [Labor-Based Grading Contracts](#) (Asao's book on contract grading)
- [Labor-Based Grading Contract Resources](#), a blog post with additional examples of grading contracts, an infographic demonstrating the advantages of grading contracts, etc.

But there are also other resources, including

- A special issue on labor-based contract grading [with the Journal of Writing Assessment](#)
- [Ungrading](#), edited Susan Blum
- Laura Gibbs's "[all feedback no grades](#)" approach
- Jesse Stommel's resources (start with "[How to Ungrade](#)" and "[Why I Don't Grade](#)", along w/ a [bibliography](#)). I relied on Stommel's work to develop my self-assessments in particular.
- [Grading Student Writing: Making it Simpler, Fairer, Clearer](#); Peter Elbow
- [Do Grades Make Our Lives Worse?](#) by Elizabeth Williams. This is a good piece on why grades don't actually do what we think they do and may actually undermine education.

How do I talk about linguistic diversity and antiracism with students?

Ungrading is not automatically antiracist, and in fact, many versions of ungrading circulate without direct attention to racial equity. Inoue's work, however, argues that labor-based grading is valuable in part as a way to open space for students to write in their own voice and for teachers to address linguistic diversity and the connections between language and identity.

If you're looking to address this with your class, here are some resources I've found useful:

- [Should Writers Use They Own English?](#) Vershawn Ashanti Young
- [Three Ways to Speak English](#), Jamila Lysicot (TED Talk video, 4.5 minutes long)
- [Embracing Multilingualism and Eradicating Linguistic Bias](#), Karen Leung (TED talk, 8 minutes long)
- [Dressed but Not Tryin' to Impress: Black Women Deconstructing "Professional" Dress](#); Brittany Hull, Cecilia Shelton, and Temptuous McCoy
- [Sociolinguistics: Crash Course #7](#) (YouTube video, 11 minutes long)
- Y'all, Youse, and You Guys, NYT interactive quiz [this quiz is no longer available without an NYT subscription]

You may also appreciate “[10 Ways to Address Linguistic Bias in our Classrooms](#),” which directed me to some of the resources I include here. Also, if you’re at UTK, our library has a copy of April Baker-Bell’s *Linguistic Justice*.

Critiques of Ungrading

Two critiques are worth drawing attention to here.

First, while ungrading can often play a key role in dismantling linguistic racism in the classroom, it is not the cure-all, and if we treat it as a stopping point rather than a starting point, it can actually reinforce oppression and override the preferences and expertise of scholars of color. Sherri Craig [has an important piece about this at the WPA Journal](#).

Second, depending on the definition(s) of “labor” used and how teacher and students measure it, labor-based models in particular may make it harder, not easier, for neurodiverse students to succeed. Used to working within a conventionally graded system, they may find it difficult to switch to new system. For more information, see

- [Kryger and Zimmerman](#), *Journal of Writing Assessment*
- Ellen Carillo, [The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Grading](#)

And one more resource:

Because labor-based grading is often process focused (see Danielewicz and Elbow 2008), meaning it makes room for students to practice a revision-focused writing process, using it often requires that we change our feedback-giving habits. I find Grant Wiggins’ blog post, “[What Feedback Is and Isn’t](#),” particularly helpful for this.

Keep in mind that there are *lots* of ways to ungrade! Nobody has “one right way;” pick something that makes sense to you and start there.