

Ungrading / Going Gradeless

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Outline

Why grading is bad

What you can do instead

Where to read more

Grading Bad!



"What's the least you would take for teaching this course?"

The professor looked right at him, and said, "Oh, I'll teach for free," before adding, "but you're going to have to pay me to grade."

[Establishing a Fair and Supportive Grading Environment](#)

What's Wrong with Grades?

Paraphrased from [From Degrading to De-Grading: Kohn](#)

- Grades shift student focus from learning to scoring
- Grades encourage students to avoid challenges
- Grades aren't valid, reliable, objective
- Grading takes time better spent on education
- Grades come between the teacher and the student

Grades Shift Focus from Learning

BUTLER, R. (1988). ENHANCING AND UNDERMINING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION: THE EFFECTS OF TASK-INVOLVING AND EGO-INVOLVING EVALUATION ON INTEREST AND PERFORMANCE. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1988.tb00874.x>

132 fifth and sixth grade Israeli pupils did Tasks A and B in Session 1. Two days later they did Task C in Session 2 and Tasks A and B in Session 3.

Task A: form words from a list of Hebrew letters

Task B: "other uses" creativity task

Three conditions: grades only, **comments only**, **grades plus comments**.

Comments used the following templates

Task A: You thought of quite a few correct words; maybe it is possible to think of more short words / more long words / even more words.

Task B: You thought of quite a few interesting uses (or "ideas" for the circles task); maybe it is possible to think of more uses (or ideas. . .) / more different uses/more unusual uses which other children may not think of.

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGES OF PUPILS WHO IMPROVED ON EACH TASK COMPONENT BY COMMENT RECEIVED ON SESSION 1

Positive change for Session 3 — Session 1	Suggestion for Improvement					
	<i>Task A</i>					
	Short words		Long words			
	Comment	Grades plus Comments	Comment	Grades plus Comments	Comment	Grades plus Comments
Short words	87	31	42	24		
Long words	27	25	95	35		
Positive change for Session 3 — Session 1	<i>Task B</i>					
	More ideas		More different ideas		More unusual ideas	
	Comment	Grades plus Comments	Comment	Grades plus Comments	Comment	Grades plus Comments
Fluency	100	22	46	31	46	10
Flexibility	50	22	92	31	38	30
Originality	22	22	8	13	77	20

132 fifth and sixth grade Jewish Israeli pupils (68 boys, 64 girls, mean age 11) from 12 randomly selected classes in 4 elementary city schools serving predominantly middle-class populations.

Alternatives

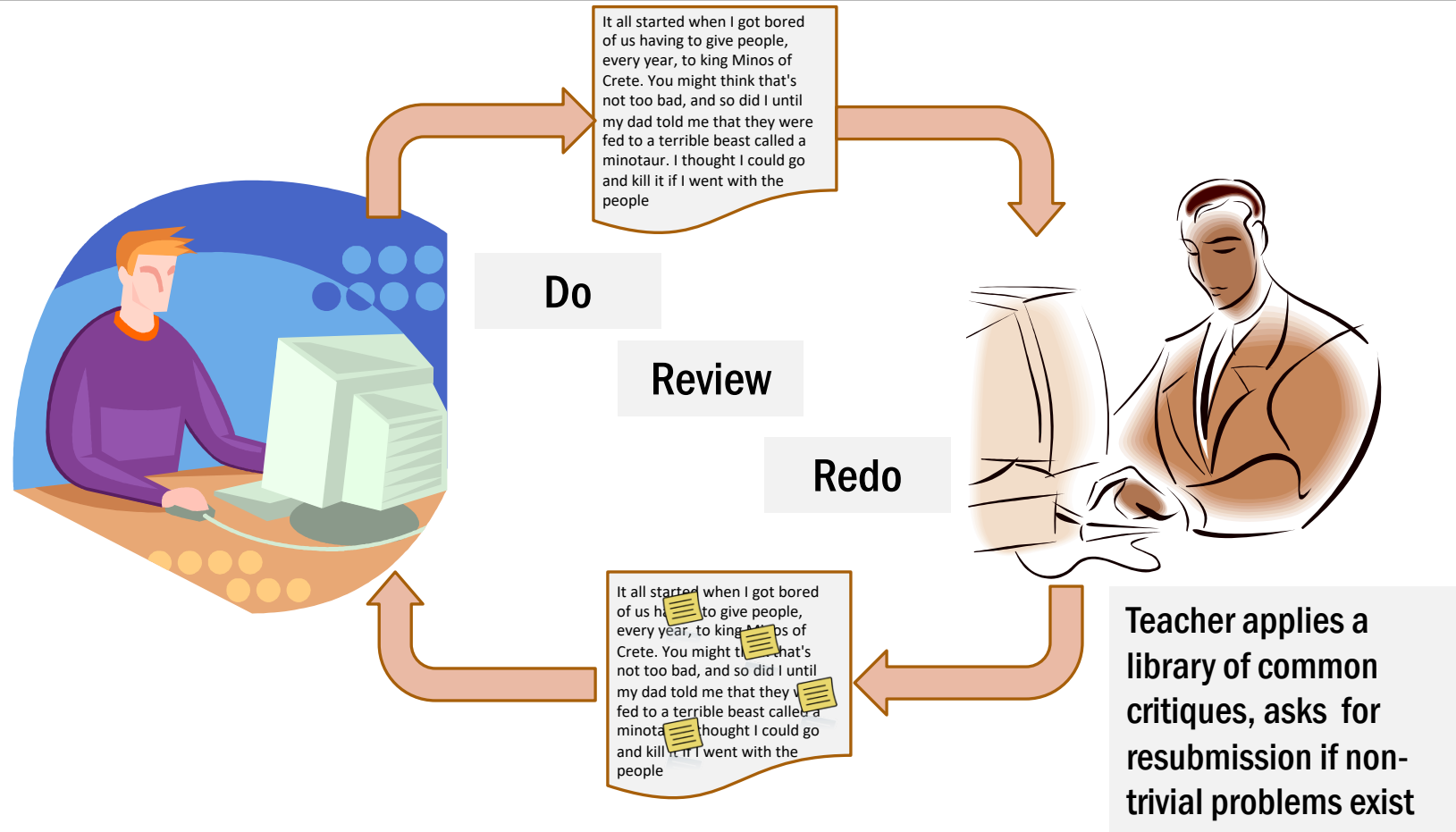
EVEN IN A GRADED ENVIRONMENT LIKE NORTHWESTERN

What I Do

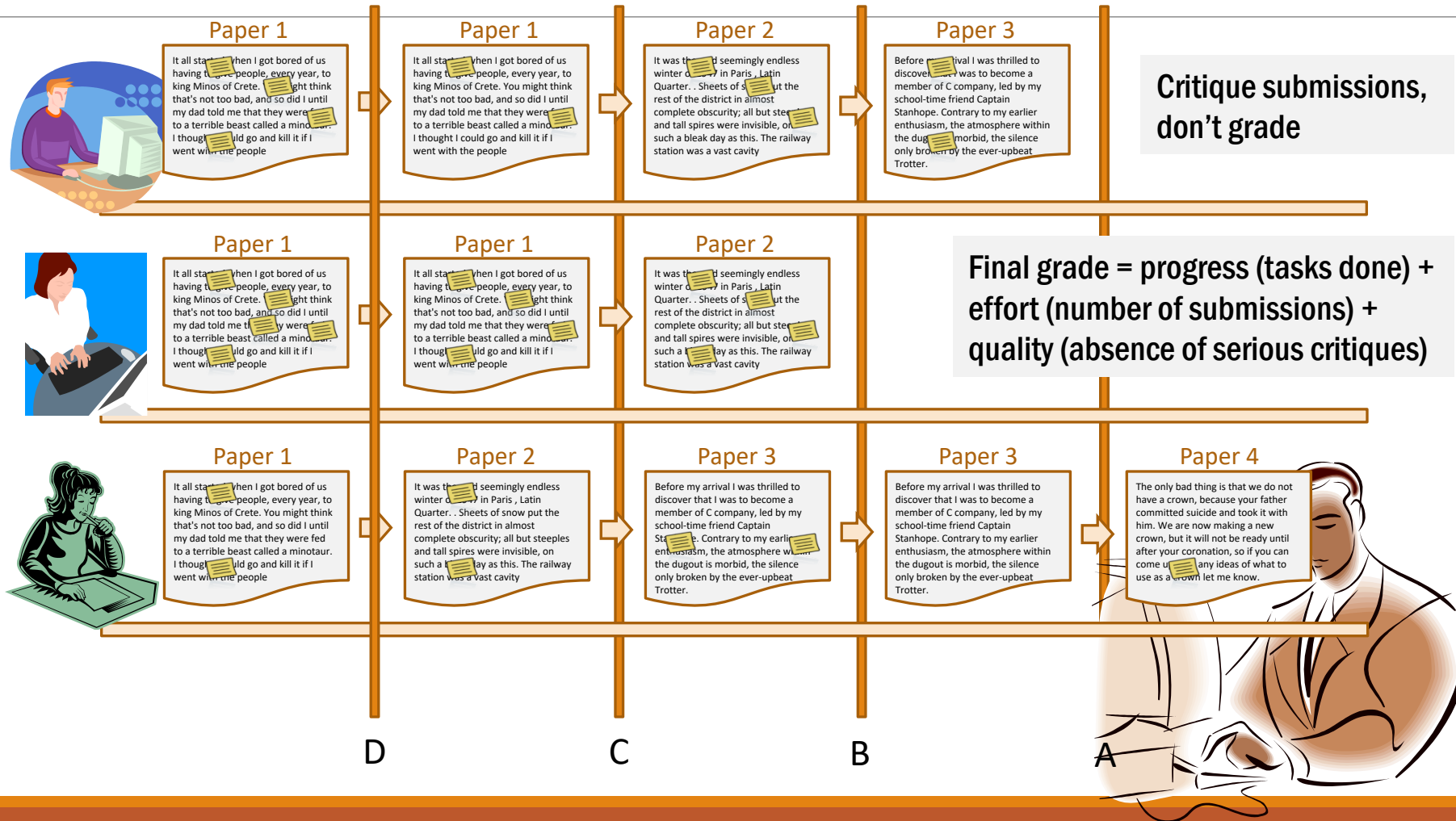
Critique, don't grade

- Courses: CS 325 Intro AI Programming, and other programming courses
- Focus on individual development of multiple coding skills

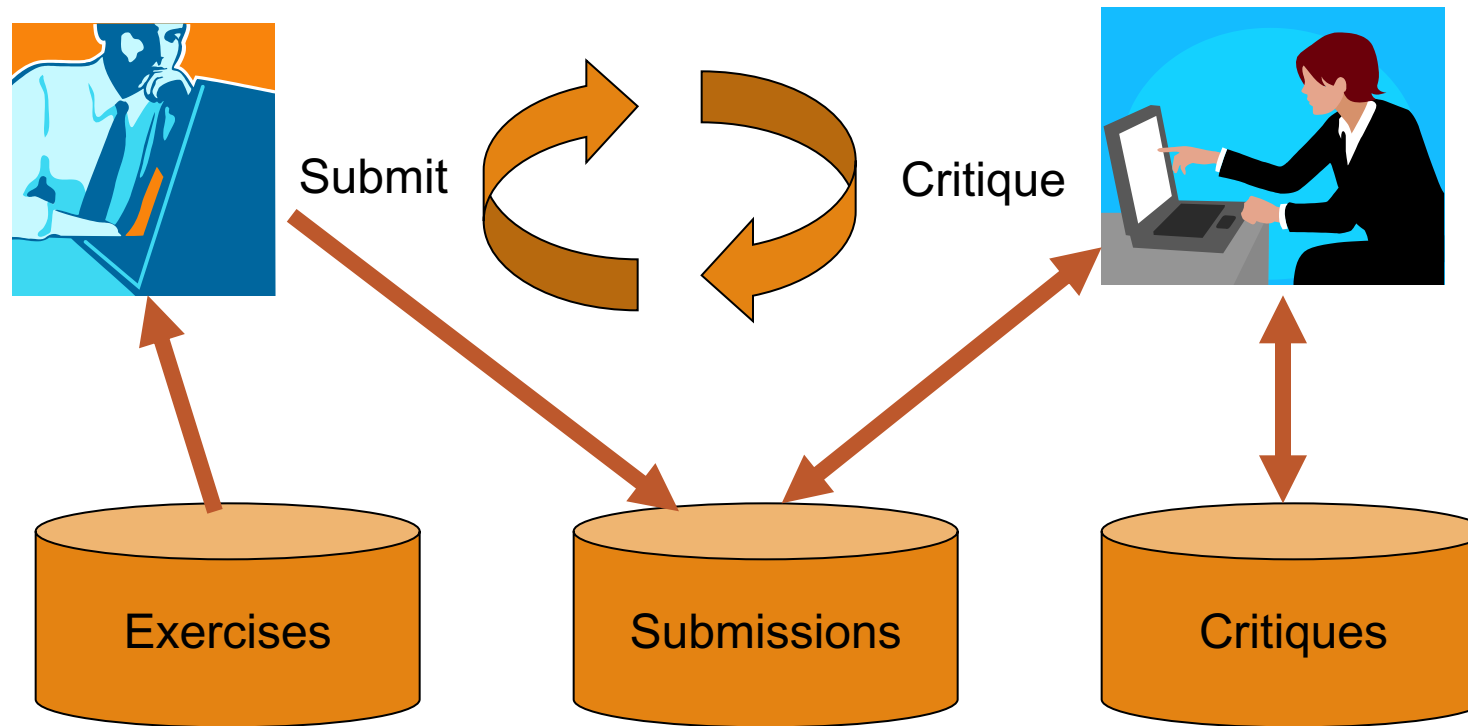
Feedback, Not Grades



Assessment



Critiquing Tools



What I Do

Critique, don't grade

- Courses: CS 325 Intro AI Programming, and other programming courses
- Focus on individual development of multiple coding skills

Grade participation

- Used in CS 394 Agile development, CS 397 Rapid prototyping, MPD 405 Software project management
- Focus on teamwork, client-developer communications, project planning and tracking

Grading Participation

Define many activities to promote learning.

- self-paced tutorials, structured discussions, team projects, team coaching, ...

Grade only on participation in the activities.

- attendance, timeliness, perseverance, ...

Any assessment of learning is to evaluate the activities, not the learners.

Scoring Task Progress with Snapshots

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Name	Github repo	Public URL	Initial app	Title display	Course list	Modularize
2		<i>link to repo</i>	<i>link to host</i>	<i>link to commit</i>	<i>link to commit</i>	<i>link to commit</i>	<i>link to comr</i>
3	Helen Vince	https://github.com	https://coursesc	https://github.com	https://github.com		
4	Carter Ventura						
5	Josh Tyler	https://github.com	https://scheduler	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://githu
6	Barney Rose						
7	Marvin Vaughan	https://github.com					
8	Brad Roth	https://github.com	https://schedule	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://githu
9	Nick Craig						
10	Susan Rees	https://github.com	https://coursepla	https://github.com/	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://githu
11	Doug Morgan						
12	Mark White	https://github.com	https://a-course-	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://githu
13	Jennifer Hale	https://github.com					
14	Diane Drummond	https://github.com					
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17	Alexander White	https://github.com	https://schedule	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://githu
18	Chanelle Hill	https://github.com	https://selector-6	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://github.com	https://githu
19	Margot Fleming	hjpnam/ReactNa	https://cs?94sch	Change the title	Change the title	courseList displa	modularize

Students record progress ↴

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I post a shared snapshot summary

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Name	Expo	1/14	1/16	1/18	1/20	1/22	1/24	1/26
2		14							
3	Helen Vince	9.2	4	0	5	0	0	1	0
4	Carter Ventura	7.2	0	1	3	1	1	1	1
5	Josh Tyler	14	14						
6	Barney Rose	7.2	0	3	3	2	0	0	0
7	Marvin Vaughan	11.6	1	1	0	0	12		
8	Brad Roth	14	14						
9	Nick Craig	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Susan Rees	14	14						
11	Doug Morgan	6.3	0	1	1	2	1	2	0
12	Mark White	14	14						
13	Jennifer Hale	8.4	1	6	0	0	0	2	0
14	Diane Drummond	10.6	1	6	0	1	1	2	0
15	Elijah Vallory	11	2	2	4	2	1	0	0
16	Rebecca Baxter	7	2	1	1	1	2	0	0
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Students record progress

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I post a shared snapshot summary

Gaps decrease remaining value

Students record progress

Structured Class Discussion Sheets

	A	B	C	D	E	F	
1	Name	What confused you, if anything?	What points about user testing do you agree with most?	What points do you disagree with most?	What ideas / techniques surprised you?	What links looked most interesting?	And
2	Mara Hogg	How can you make sure they actually give criticism?	Don't walk them through it-makes sure that it is intuitive	Not letting them try it themselves			
3	Mohsin Horn	What do you do if they get stuck at an early stage of the point and can't move on to test the rest?	Don't give a tour of the app to them, don't help them when they get confused	No instructions on how to use the app - I would think you'd at least describe to them what it does?		build-measure-learn cycle	
4	Esmee Barrera	kill yr darlings	How to ask questions, the power of no, anything related to chris voss	getting testers might want to look outside of your value proposition to see if other ideas are helpful?		I really am interested in lean startup etc.	
5	Myah Rogers	Don't help them when they look confused	Keep your pre-test survey short and sweet. Don't scare away potential testers with a lot of questions.	Get past polite answers			
6	Danika Curtis	most of Kill Yr Darlings		not telling them "we're not testing you" https://www.slideshare.net/whitneyq/3-usability-techniques/43	it's hard to develop apps for different populations than yourself if you don't use imagining in user testing or have easy access to the target population		
7			Don't put things in the app that don't work/do anything			https://www.mycustomer.com/experience/voice-of-the-customer/the-mom-test-how	

Compared to Zoom chat, I get

- more input from more people
- less influence by early responders
- overview of common confusions and objections
- clear guidance for discussion
- easy tally of participation

Common Features of Both Techniques

No intermediate grading of submissions

Many low-stakes data points

Competency / mastery through repetition, do until done

Visible, transparent, immediate displays of progress

Clear mapping of data to final grade

Result: I spend far less time on grading or discussing grades

Resources

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

PUNISHED by REWARDS

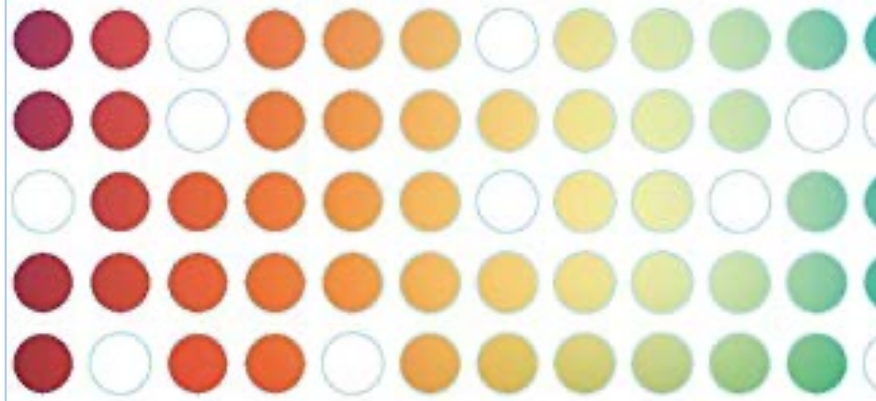
The Trouble with
GOLD STARS,
INCENTIVE PLAN\$,
A's, PRAISE,
and Other Bribes

ALFIE KOHN

With a major new afterword by the author

UNgrading

Why Rating Students
Undermines Learning
(and What to Do
Instead)



EDITED BY

Susan D. Blum

With a foreword by Alfie Kohn

Ungrading

- [From Degrading to De-Grading: Kohn](#) – summary of research on negative effects of grades on learning
- [How to Ungrade: Stommel](#)—reasons and techniques
- [Ungrading: A bibliography: Stommel](#)
- [Twenty Years Gradeless: Riesbeck](#) – critique-based assessment
- [Teachers Going Gradeless](#) web site, and Facebook group

...Many many more books and links can be easily found

Grading Participation

Often called "contract grading"

[A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching:
Danielewicz and Peter Elbow](#)

[Example labor contract for writing course](#)

[Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Inoue](#)

The purpose of schools should be to grow learners, not sort them

[Patterns Broken: The Opportunity of the Mastery Transcript](#): Ben Rein