

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course: Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice

Presenters: Kristine Nielsen and Douglas B. Reeves

Hours: 45

Required eBook: *Elements of Grading: A Guide to Effective Practice* (Douglas Reeves, Solution Tree Press, 2011)

Course Overview

Grading has a profound impact both on students' futures and on how and what they learn, and yet traditional grading is marred by undue influences and questionable practices. In this course, participants learn from workshop, classroom, and interview footage to assess their grading and feedback for accuracy, fairness, specificity, and timeliness. They explore ways to improve their feedback to students during the learning process. Finally, they question some customary practices—including not distinguishing academic from behavioral issues, giving mathematically imprecise zeros, and grading the process rather than the product—and consider elegant and efficient alternatives to affect student engagement and achievement.

Presenters' Bios

Dr. Kris Nielsen works with schools nationally and internationally on issues of school improvement, assessment, instructional strategies, planning, and the effective use of data to improve school processes and instruction. She coaches principals and teachers in effective planning and in quality implementation of research-based practices. Dr. Nielsen's experience includes tenure as the Executive Director of the Minnesota Administrators Leadership Forum, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She has also been a high school administrator, a preK-12 staff development director, an elementary Title 1 and gifted/talented coordinator, and a teacher of English, language arts, composition, and humanities. Dr. Nielsen's doctorate is in educational policy and administration.

Dr. Douglas Reeves is founder of the Leadership and Learning Center. He is a frequent keynote speaker for education, business, nonprofit, and government organizations throughout the world. The author of more than twenty books and many articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, he has twice been selected for the Harvard Distinguished Authors Series. He was named the 2006 Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. He also received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Parents' Choice Award for his writing for children and parents.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, educators will know:

- Methods for revising existing grading systems to provide feedback and grades that are:
 - Accurate



- Fair
- Specific
- Timely
- Strategies for improving feedback

Student Learning Outcomes

- After completing this course, educators will apply the following skills:
- Analyze and revise their current grading practices
- Render grades and feedback accurate, fair, specific, and timely

Unit 1: Introduction to Grading Practices

In this unit, presenters Doug Reeves and Kris Nielsen establish context for the course by exploring the importance of grades and their potential impact on students. With the workshop participants, they establish grades as a means to track students' growth and progress and to indicate what students need, even while they look into what influences and sometimes distorts grades.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The impact of grades
- What influences grades

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Monitor and manage what is influencing their grades, including bias and a failure to distinguish academic from behavioral issues

Text: eBook: "Introduction"

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 2: Facilitating Change

In this unit, Reeves and Nielsen invite the workshop and online participants to consider how their grading practices have and/or should evolve based on the consequences of personal experience, collective experience, systematic observation, and the preponderance of evidence.

Unit Objective



After completing this unit, educators will know:

- What affects—and should affect—changes in practice

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Explore the impact of belief, personal experience, collective experience, systematic observation, and preponderance of evidence on their grading practice

Texts: eBook: “Grading is Feedback” and “The Grading Debate”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 3: Feedback and Formative Assessment

In this unit, the presenters discuss grading as feedback—grades’ most essential function—pursuing with participants how to improve their practice in relation to using feedback to help students assess their process, progress, and product and raise student achievement. They consider what constitutes accuracy in grades and means of distinguishing academic from behavioral factors. Classroom footage illustrates and extends this unit’s content.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The functions of feedback
- Methods for providing accurate feedback and grades
- When to apply grades to student work

Student Learning Outcome

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Employ effective feedback to impact student achievement

Texts: eBook: “How to Improve Accuracy” and “How to Improve Fairness”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.



Unit 4: Fairness and Specificity

In this unit, the presenters shift from how to make grades accurate to how to make them fair and specific. They ask questions about how a teacher’s scaffolding affects grades, how parent involvement does, and whether standards should be modified for different students. Nielsen presents Reeve’s simple system for a standards-based report card that provides a student and his or her parents with precise information about what a student knows and is able to do—and needs to focus on next.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- What makes grades fair
- What makes grades specific
- A simple standards-based report card

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Conduct “reality checks” to assess the effectiveness of their grading
- Provide fair grades
- Provide specific grades and feedback

Texts: eBook: “How to Improve Specificity” and “How to Improve Timeliness”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 5: Timeliness and Students’ Role

The presenters and participants address timeliness in this unit, exploring how to give students feedback immediately and efficiently to directly affect their process and progress. Participants address the question of the relationship between grades and the “real world,” and how to involve students in their own assessment. Classroom examples illustrate this unit’s themes.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- What makes grades and feedback timely
- The role of students in their own assessment

Student Learning Outcomes



After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Render grades and feedback timely
- Involve students in assessment

Text: eBook: “Time-Saving Strategies for Busy Teachers”

Participants read selections from the eBook and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 6: Breaking the Rules

In this unit, participants face head-on such controversial issues as whether to assign zeros or grade homework. They discuss the degree to which grades are used as discipline and whether that use is appropriate. They also scrutinize the provocative truth that “A” students and “D” students tend to be distinguishable less by how much they are learning than by their behavior and ability to “play school.”

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The problem with zeros
- The debate on grading homework

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Carefully consider their use of zeros and the appropriateness of grading homework
- Find substitutes for zeros
- Avoid using grades as disciplinary tools
- Analyze what makes students high or low grade earners

Methods of Instruction

- Videos (presentations consisting of lecture, interviews, and classroom footage)
- eBook (chapters and exercises from the eBook)
- Reflection questions (open-ended questions at intervals throughout the video presentations where participants are asked to reflect on the course content, their own practice, and their intentions for their practice)
- Quizzes (selected-response quizzes to assess understanding of the video presentations and eBook content)



Plagiarism Policy

KDS recognizes plagiarism as a serious academic offense. Plagiarism is the passing off of someone else's work as one's own and includes failing to cite sources for others' ideas, copying material from books or the Internet (including lesson plans and rubrics), and handing in work written by someone other than the participant. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and may have additional consequences. For more information about plagiarism and guidelines for appropriate citation, consult plagiarism.org.

Passing Requirements:

In order to complete the requirements of the course, the participant must complete all course work (e.g., reflections, quizzes, and any midterm and/or final), including watching all videos and participating in all discussion forums. We do not award partial credit.

- Quizzes 40% of total grade
- Reflection Questions 60% of total grade

KDS Self-Assessment Rubric:

	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory
Quizzes	100% Correct	80% Correct	60% Correct	0-40% Correct
Reflection Questions	Participant provides rich detail from the content of the course in his or her responses Participant makes his or her responses to the questions personally meaningful	Participant includes appropriate content from the course in his or her responses Participant makes thoughtful comments in direct response to the questions	Participant includes some content from the course, usually appropriate, in his or her responses Participant answers the questions directly, not always fully	Participant includes no content from the course in his or her responses Participant does not address the questions posed