

Contract Grading Explained

Contract Grading

Labor-Based (or “work-based”) Contract Grading is a system of grading based off the research of Asao Inoue (2015; 2018). It differs from traditional grading in that you do not receive a grade based on the subjective quality of your work, but instead based on the labor (or work) you complete within the course. In other words, you will receive feedback from me, comments, suggestions for revision, encouragement, and support, but you will not receive an “A, B, C, D, or E” based on how “well” you completed the project.

FAQs

Q: Will I still receive grades for my projects?

A: Yes, there are three types of labor in our class—**projects, practices, and community labor**. In the first type you will receive a grade based on the following table:

Project Grading Table

Criteria	Grade Earned
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project includes all specified criteria (ex. page length, parts of project, types of questions explored, number of texts or sources used, etc.)** Your project must include all significant, observable criteria or it will be returned to you for revisionTurned in within 48 hours of the assigned project deadline	B
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is more than 2 days late or missing 1 criteria	B-
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is more than 4 days late or missing 2 criteria	C+
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is more than 6 days late or missing 3 criteria	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is more than 8 days late or missing 4 criteria	C-
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your project is 10 days late or later or missing 5 criteria	D
<ul style="list-style-type: none">You didn't turn in the project or it was missing all criteria	0

Q: Can I revise projects if they are missing criteria?

A: Yes. If you turn in a project missing criteria you will be informed and given a new time deadline to return the project to be eligible for a B. If you choose not to revise you may elect to keep the score lower than a B.

Q: What????!! How do I get an A on my projects?

A: In order to move up from any of these scores, at the time you turn in the project you will have the option to complete any of the 3 “+” parts associated with the project. (Ex. if you are completing a tutorial project an example of a + part might be a 2-page audience analysis. If you are writing a short story an example of a + part might be to write a scene in an alternate point of view.)

It is important to note that each assignment prompt will always include the 3 optional + parts from the start. If you turn in your completed project on-time and you do 1 + part that = B+, 2 = A-, and 3 = A. However, these + parts can also help you to move up from any of the other scores on the table. So, if you turn in a project 10 days late, but you complete all 3 + parts you can move from a D to a C.

Q: So the + parts are extra credit?

A: Not exactly. The + parts are designed to move your learning experience from a B to an A level of exceptional work. However, they are also designed to be accessible. What that means is that even if you are struggling with the assignment, you will be able to complete any or all of the 3 + parts. Also, unlike extra credit, the + parts **MUST** be turned in at the time of the assignment. However, you will have the opportunity to complete only 2 additional + parts (not per project, but 2 in total) by the last day of classes. This is so that if you had wanted to do more but life got in the way, you still have a small chance to do so at the end. **HOWEVER**, you cannot turn in more than 2 + parts in total at the end.

Q: You said there were three types of labor—projects, practices, and community labor. How do the others work?

A: Practices are completion-based homework and informal writing. You will receive a score based on the number you complete within 48 hours of the time assigned. (# completed/#offered.) Practices cannot be turned in later than 48 hours of the assignment because they are based on *practicing* for the projects.

Community Labor is also graded on a completion score (# completed/#offered) with a grace allowance of 3. (This means you can miss up to 3 community assignments or participation in class days.) Like in-class participation, community labor assignments benefit your class community, such as peer review letters or critiques.

Q: Why did you do this? What if I’m used to getting As in my writing classes? Doesn’t this system hurt me?

A: Labor-based contract grading is meant to address inequities in courses. If you consider yourself an “A” writer, this system does not disadvantage you. It will likely still take you less time to complete a project or a + part, and if you identify as loving writing—it might be “more fun” for you than it is for some of your peers. That is still a tangible advantage. What labor-based

grading does is try to correct for some of the subjectivity of writing, some of the power structures by which we assess writing, and make it possible for everyone to earn the grade for which they labor.

****Labor is NOT the Same as Effort**

Labor-based systems are different from assessing people based on “effort.” I have no way of knowing how much effort you put into any given project. I cannot look into your minds, hearts, or lives and know that. Therefore, grading on effort would not be a fair system. For example, you might put forth a tremendous amount of effort (and I hope you do!) However, I have no way of fairly assessing how much “effort” a project required of you. What I can assess is how much labor you completed in terms of how many projects and project components (+ parts) you chose to complete. I understand that it may take different students different amounts of time to complete projects, but a labor-based system focuses solely on good faith completion, and writing as a learning process.

Q: This seems difficult.

A: I think it might be a difficult adjustment for some of you at first. But remember, you will still receive grades. This system just removes some of the surprises from grading. It isn't perfect, but you know when you did a + part or you didn't and you know when you turned something in on-time or you didn't. Beyond that, you will still receive all the feedback, support, and encouragement you need in order to revise and improve on your writing projects and learning process.