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| **100%: Best Practices in Grading** | | | |
|  | Strategy | Rationale | Making it Work |
| Setting the Stage | |  |  |
|  | Make your expectations clear | The more explicit you are about the objectives of the assignment, the more likely it is that students will be able to meet them. | Key tools for communicating expectations are your syllabus, rubrics, and assignment sheets. |
|  | Use frequent assessments in a variety of formats | Frequent assessment ensures that students have ample opportunity to earn grades without the pressure of a high-stakes all-or-nothing assignment. Multiple formats gives students with diverse learning styles an opportunity to capitalize on their strengths, while building new skills. | Experiment with different types of assignments (including low-stakes self-testing and reflection, as well as high-stakes formal assignments) to help students approach the subject matter from different perspectives. |
|  | Give students ownership | “Ownership” both motivates and engages students, and can be accomplished in a variety of ways from allowing students to have voice in the types of assignments they will complete, the topics they will work on, the criteria most appropriate for evaluation, or the weighting of the various assessments | While a powerful tool for engaging students, it is very important to structure their choices carefully, especially in lower levels. Offer only those choices that you know are consistent with the overall objectives of the course, and that will contribute to student learning. |
|  | Provide models | Models provide concrete examples of the expectations for a specific assignment and discipline. They can be student samples from similar assignments, examples from professional academic work, or be customized for the particular assignment. | Choose samples carefully and be sure to clarify for students what is being modeled. For example, a scholarly article might be at a much higher level than what students are expected to produce, but will still help them to understand the genre and disciplinary conventions. |
| Ensuring Fairness and Consistency | |  |  |
|  | Grade according to specified criteria | Criterion-referenced grading ensures students realize that their grades are not just subjective opinions or comparisons to their classmates, but based on specific aspects of their performance. Being explicit about your grading criteria helps also helps student understand what they are expected to know and be able to do, and clarifies where they need to focus their efforts to improve. | Rubrics are a very useful tool for articulating your expectations. They can be analytic, detailing each criterion and range, or holistic, focusing only on a few key criteria. Either way, rubrics help both to explain and justify grades as well as to provide formative insight. |
|  | Benchmark with multiple graders | As multiple graders are likely to apply very different criteria in different ways when marking assignments, benchmarking is very useful for generating consistency and fairness, especially in large courses. | After assignments have been submitted, have all graders meet to go over two or three samples to ensure everyone understands what the criteria are, how they are to be applied, and the appropriate rewards and penalties |
| Giving Feedback | |  |  |
|  | Offer formative feedback | Feedback is most effective when it gives students concrete guidance on what they need to do to improve their mastery of course material | Low-stakes assignments early on, and throughout your course, will give students ongoing opportunities to chart their progress and make adjustments as necessary |
|  | Focus on higher order concerns | Marginal comments often target lower-order concerns such as grammar and typographical errors that the grader noticed when reading through the assignment. However, these types of comments are least likely to help students understand where they went wrong. | Respond as a genuine reader who is engaging in dialogue with an author, and keep comments focused on global issues that the student needs to work on. |
|  | Ensure responses are timely | If students wait too long between submitting an assignment and receiving feedback, they are less likely to understand comments, where they went wrong, and how that feedback is relevant to helping them improve for the future. | Provide self-testing, peer review, or low-stakes assignments that allow students to gather feedback throughout your course. Try to ensure that major assignments are returned as quickly as possible. |
| Preserving Time and Energy | |  |  |
|  | Give group feedback | Rather than writing the same comment over and over again in the margins of assignments, it can save time to simply announce those common errors to the class as a whole. | Be as specific as possible, so that students are clear as to whether and how this feedback is relevant to them |
|  | Take advantage of technology | Technology allows for many opportunities for students to self-test and receive instantaneous feedback. | Be sure to include feedback so that students will know why their answer is wrong or right, and not just that it is. |
|  | Harness student energy | The more actively students are engaged in their own learning, the deeper and more significant that learning will be. | Coach students on effective feedback and self-evaluation, then enlist them to do the work of reflecting on their level of understanding or providing feedback to each other in draft stages of assignments. |