



GRADING ONLINE CONTENT PROVIDER WORK

One topic many new and experienced blended learning educators wrestle with is how - or if - to incorporate the work students complete on content providers into a gradebook. While this can seem like a daunting or complex task, Seton has found that when online lessons are a clear and tangible part of a student's grade, it reinforces student ownership and urgency towards their learning, and creates a layer of accountability that strongly complements a teacher's incentives and reward systems.

This resource examines [the factors](#) educators should consider when deciding how to grade students' online work, as well as provides [examples](#) of various approaches. Additionally, this resource presents a grade level-specific [progression](#) of how teachers may gradually incorporate different variables into grades over the course of a year.



FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN GRADING

How should a student's work on the computer factor into their class grade?

Context

A common challenge for first year blended learning teachers is determining how to factor online work into student grades. There is no one “right” way to grade blended learning work, but many teachers usually adopt one or more of the grading systems outlined below. In many instances teachers may start the year using one grading approach that meets the initial needs of the classroom, but may change course and adopt a new approach as the needs of the class evolve over the course of the year (see examples grading progressions [here](#)).

Best practices

There are two general best practices that should guide your thinking as how to best incorporate online learning into your class gradebook. First, *at least* twenty to thirty percent of a student's grade for any blended subject should be directly correlated to their online learning. Second, the way that online learning impacts a student's class grade should be clearly communicated and readily understood by students. As a “check” on any grading scheme it is worth asking yourself the following:

1. Can the role online learning plays in the overall class grade be easily explained to parents and students?
2. Will students be able to explain how their work on an online content provider affects their class grade?

Grading frequency

Another common question from teachers in their first year of blended learning is, “How often should I take a grade for online learning?” When answering the following it is worthwhile to consider the following:

1. Grades (in all classrooms, not just blended learning classrooms) often serve as the final “backstop” that is in place to hold students accountable for their learning. As such, work should be collected and assessed frequently enough to effectively hold students accountable and encourage sustained effort. This is also true of online work.
2. Grades are a form of feedback on class performance--students should receive timely feedback so they know where they stand and have an opportunity to correct their course when feasible. If blended learning grades and other forms of feedback are infrequent, then students are not being provided with authentic opportunities to “own” their learning and growth.



EXAMPLES OF GRADING APPROACHES

Grading approach #1: Time on task and engagement

Summary

This approach to grading is predicated on assigning a grade based on students demonstrating on-task behavior while engaged with online content providers. Think of it as the blended learning equivalent of a traditional participation grade. Under this approach, teachers would set a daily or weekly goal for the amount of time that students should be actively working on online content. If a student met the time-on-task goal and did not require behavioral redirection then the student would earn the full point value.

Considerations

- **Pros:** The majority of content providers automatically track and report student time on task; as a result, this is a low-lift metric for teachers to transfer into the gradebook
- **Cons:** Behavioral compliance doesn't necessarily mean learning is taking place.

Grading approach #2: Assessing written evidence

Summary

This approach to grading is predicated on implementing a note-taking, reflection, or other standardized writing system that pushes students to record evidence of their online learning on paper. Examples include [this note catcher](#), [this note catcher](#), and [this lesson notes document](#).

Considerations

- **Pros:** Requiring written evidence of online learning holds students accountable because it requires that they engage with the content beyond “clicking-through” a lesson. It also produces a record of their online learning that can be easily collected in a binder and this type of system may feel familiar to teachers who are accustomed to collecting and grading work regularly. This paper record may also be useful when conferencing with students or families about student progress.
- **Cons:** This approach can be time and energy intensive; especially if there are substantial grading demands that are arising from small group instruction. This approach also requires a high degree of sustained organization from both the teacher and students. Organization expectations may have to be retaught and renormed from time-to-time throughout the year.



Grading approach #3: Count of lessons passed

Summary

This approach to grading is predicated on a teacher setting a regular goal for how many lessons a student should successfully complete during the course of a particular interval of instruction (usually weekly or biweekly). This goal could be set universally (e.g. “*Everyone should complete 4 iReady math lessons this week*”) or it may be tailored to individual student depending on circumstance (e.g. “*Timothy--I know your next couple of lessons are ‘Close Reading’ lessons in iReady that take longer to complete--I want you to complete 2 of those lessons this week*”).

Under this grading approach if a student meets the goal that was set for the number of lessons passed they would earn the full point value of the weekly online learning grade. Students who fall short of the goal would earn points on a prorated scale that would be created by the teacher.

Considerations

- **Pros:** The criteria for grading is easy to communicate in student-friendly language. For example, a teacher can say “If you reach your goal by passing 5/5 lessons this week you will earn full credit--20/20 pts for your weekly grade.”
- **Cons:**
 - Teachers need to have accurate knowledge of how long specific student lessons *should* take so that they can set and communicate an ambitious yet feasible goal for the number of lessons that should be passed.
 - Students may progress through certain lessons at different rates--communicating tailored goals may require time or the creation of a goal communication system.
 - A teacher’s “bar” for passing a lesson may be lower than the default setting in a content provider. For example, Mrs. B wants her students to demonstrate 80% mastery on a math skill before they move on, but the default in iReady is 75%. Passing percentage thresholds are often adjustable, but this may require additional time to adjust.

Grading approach #4: Pass rate-to-grade correspondence

Summary

This approach to grading looks at the percentage of lessons passed during a particular interval of instruction. Often, teachers use this approach to enter a grade for online learning on a weekly or biweekly basis. For example, a teacher using Imagine Math may look at the lesson pass rate and develop the following correspondence to input grades:



Imagine Math Pass Rate	Point Value in Gradebook
92-100%	20/20 pts
83-91%	18/20 pts
74-82%	16/20 pts
66-73%	14/20 pts

Considerations

- **Pros:** Accessing pass rates is quick and easy in content provider reports, making it an easy metric to transfer to a class gradebook.
- **Cons:** Relying exclusively on pass rates may not account for a situation where a student passes 100% of lessons but that 100% is the result of a student only passing 1 lesson early in the week and then “slacking off” and not making effective use of additional time provided to pass lessons.

Grading approach #5: Demonstrated growth

Summary

This approach is predicated on a teacher relying on the growth measures provided by content providers and then transferring measures of growth into point values in the gradebook. In some cases teachers choose to award a point value on a binary basis--students demonstrating growth earn points, while those students who did not grow do not earn points. In other cases teachers may devise sliding scales where students meeting or exceeding expectations for growth earn full points with those students falling short earning diminishing points values based on how far off they were from their expected growth goals.

Considerations

- **Pros:** This approach closely tracks what matters most--students growing in their knowledge and skills in a particular content area.
- **Cons:**
 - The ability to rely on demonstrated growth is directly dependent on the frequency of growth assessments offered by a particular content provider. Content providers have different intervals and qualifiers for how and when student growth can be assessed. For example, Achieve3000 adjusts student Lexile growth on a monthly basis, assuming that students also meet the usage requirement of 4 sets of



post-reading activity questions. iReady allows for growth measures to be assigned, but recommends that only 3 growth measures be assigned during the course of the year.

- A student's growth is not determined exclusively by the content provider. It is the responsibility of the teacher to grow each student's knowledge and skill-set in a particular subject. Content providers should be considered tools that allow the teacher to be more effective instructional leaders. Therefore, a lack of student growth may not be reflective of the student's utilization of a content provider, but may actually be reflective of substandard instruction.

Grading approach #6: Hybrid models

Summary

Many teachers choose to adopt a hybrid system that combines components of several of the approaches outlined above.

Example

- A kindergarten teacher may input a grade for both time on task (Approach #1) and iReady pass rates in math and reading (approach #4) because between the approaches grades are being assigned for both effort/compliance and content mastery.



PROGRESSION OF GRADING SCHEMES: CASE STUDIES

These progressions are not intended to be exemplars. Rather they reflect the real-life progressions that teachers worked through during their first year of Blended Learning. The approach that the teacher took is followed by their thought-process or rationale in italics.

Grade	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time on Task recorded on a daily running record, but inputted into gradebook as a weekly total. <p><i>"I want a 'quick and easy' way to assess kids as they were just 'learning the ropes' of using iReady. Basically if kids were working and didn't need a lot of redirection they received full participation pts."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time on Task recorded on a daily running record, but inputted into gradebook as a weekly total. iReady Pass Rate assessed biweekly <p><i>"My students are at a place where they are pretty compliant and on-task when on computers, now I want to reward and hold students accountable for quality work"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time on Task Count of Lessons Passed <p><i>"As the year progressed I noticed that lesson rigor and length was becoming pretty different when comparing student-to-student. Moving to setting a goal for the number of lessons passed helped me keep individual students motivated."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count of Lessons Passed (with goals communicated and assessed on a weekly basis) Demonstrated Growth per iReady Diagnostic <p><i>"Knowing about Growth Mindset, I really tried to stress growth as the most important thing. I wanted to reflect the importance of growth in my grading system, so I entered a graded assignment for the level of growth"</i></p>
7th Grade (Reading /ELA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time on Task assessed on a weekly interval Demonstrated Growth (if Lexile increases month-to-month 10/10 pts earned, if Lexile does not go up 0/10 pts. <p><i>"I wanted students to feel successful, so I started with time-on-task almost as 'gimme' participation points. But, I also wanted to include a grade that hold students accountable for their growth as readers; after all, that's the whole point."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written Evidence (collected daily, but assessed weekly) Demonstrated Growth (if Lexile goes up at all, 10/10 pts earned, if Lexile does not go up 0/10 pts for a monthly grade) <p><i>"Students were not taking their time and really engaging with the non-fiction reading they were doing through Achieve3000. It seemed like they needed an additional scaffold to support their daily engagement with articles. I started a folder system where keep article worksheets. I collect those folders and grade student work on a daily basis"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written Evidence (collected daily, but assessed weekly) Weekly Activity Score <p><i>"I liked the idea of having a grade that captures student growth, but I felt like waiting a month for the opportunity to enter a growth grade was just too long. A monthly grade did not signal how important continuous effort was to student growth. As a result, I decided enter a weekly activity score. I decided on using the activity score as a data point because I knew that as a rule of thumb that activity scores above 75% lead to Lexile increases."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written Evidence (collected daily, but assessed weekly) Weekly Activity Score <p><i>"At the beginning of each week I would share the class average activity score and set a class goal. I would also share weekly activity scores with students on an individual basis."</i></p>