

Special Topic: Assessing Student Work in the Fine Arts

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Workshop Description

This workshop will explore ways of assessing student work in subjective disciplines like art, music, creative writing, etc. We will examine strategies for clearly communicating to students 1) how they are being evaluated before they complete assignments, and 2) why their work does or does not meet instructor expectations. Beginning with an example from the field of choral conducting, we will discuss how to develop a list of expectations and evaluative criteria, assign grading value to those items, and build a grading matrix based on that information.

Workshop Outline

Introductions

The Unexpected Grade

Recall a class in your field or discipline in which the instructor gave a grade that you did not expect.

What was the class?

What was the assignment?

How were you being evaluated?

Did you know how you were being evaluated
before you completed the assignment?

Why was the grade unexpected?

Write short answers to these questions on a piece of paper. You will share your answers with others in your discipline in a moment.

Personal Rationale for Developing this Workshop

The Basics of Grading at the UW

Establish basic parameters for what merits certain grades in the courses you teach. Type a simple rubric out and keep it posted at your desk or wherever you typically grade student work.

What type of work merits a 2.0? What type of work merits a 3.0?

What type of work merits a 4.0? What type of work merits a 0.0?

There is no University-wide policy on grading. Each instructor maintains their own grading policies. Other things you should know:

Grades are confidential. According to the Privacy Act of 1974, a student's grades are confidential information, and must be treated as such. As a result, you should not email a student their grade (since email is not confidential), nor should you make graded student work available in public (i.e., it is not a good idea to pass a pile of graded exams around your class so each person can take theirs, nor is it advisable to leave graded work in the hallway or in an envelope on your office door).

You can't grade on behavior. You may not grade students on their behavior in your class, only on their academic achievement. For example, you may not grade on student attendance, but you can grade their participation in class discussions. For a fuller discussion of this topic, please see:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/conduct/grading.html>

For the basics of grading at UW, see the “Grading Practices” section of the “Faculty Resource on Grading” located online at <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/>.

A Discipline Specific Example: Choral Conducting

The best student demonstrates conducting that is beautiful, clear, intuitive, efficient, and effective. This is the ultimate goal for all choral conducting students.

If a student’s conducting does not meet these criteria, then the instructor must diagnose the cause. As easy as it is to do, the instructor cannot simply tell a student that their conducting is not beautiful and is inefficient, assign a grade of 2.6, and be done. No learning happens in this instance. We have to find those core concepts that the student does not yet comprehend or understand and find ways to offer constructive feedback.

Core principles of choral conducting (abbreviated)

- Clear ictus (beat pattern)
- Effective preparatory gestures
- Breathing with the ensemble
- Gesture fits the style and nuance of the music
- Articulated musical ideas; makes the music his/her own
- Effective expression of those musical ideas
- Adherence to established style traditions or justification for deviations
- Uses the left hand in a purposeful, clear manner
- Demonstrates the highest level of musicianship and vocal technique
- Pays attention to composer’s intent

In the field of choral conducting, students are generally evaluated four to five times per quarter while conducting a group of their peers in a laboratory setting. Repertoire generally increases in difficulty over a period of three quarters. Mastery of certain core concepts comes only through repetition and experience. We will build a grading matrix for an undergraduate course in the first quarter.

Establish a grading matrix

In the first term of undergraduate conducting, primary emphasis is on (1) clear ictus, (2) breathing with the ensemble, and (3) adherence to established style traditions or justification for deviations. Primary weight for all assignments will be placed on these three items. You can modify the matrix to be assignment specific, or take a risk and leave room for interpretation. *Note:* In subsequent terms, emphasis will shift as student skills and techniques grow and develop. Let us draw this (simplified) matrix together (see next page).

Build your own matrix and share

Split up by discipline into groups of three or four. Art folks might further divide by grouping in terms of medium or area of expertise. Brainstorm a common assignment for your field and generate a list of criteria by which you will evaluate your students. Rank the criteria in order of importance and assign point value to them. Be prepared to discuss your rationale for the criteria selected and the point value assigned with the entire class. You will also share your matrix with the class.

Questions & Answers

Workshop Summary & Evaluations

