

POINTLESS GRADING: A MODEL FROM CALCULUS

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Goal: To create a **strong association between letter grades and students' competence** in core learning outcomes, and to do this while de-emphasizing points-based assignments and grading. Additionally, to increase the transparency of performance levels required in order to earn corresponding letter grades.

The Setting: University Calculus course, enrollment caps of 25, taught with *Active Calculus* (Matt Boelkins, et. al.), using mastery-based assessments of core learning targets.

What's Gone: (1) Arbitrary point values of individual assignments and questions. (2) The "expected value" calculation of semester averages by assignment weights. (3) Numerical final averages. (4) Struggles with assigning partial credit fairly. (5) Students' anxiety.

What's New: (1) Clearly-defined benchmarks required to meet each letter grade band. (2) Transparency in the association of letter grades to performance. (3) Progress toward the final grade that cannot be revoked. (4) The students' ability to easily monitor their current grade status. (5) Less of my time spent calculating and recording grades.

Example: A set of thresholds determine a student's "base grade" in the course. An excerpt may look like:

LTs earned	AND	CP average	Base grade
11 or more	AND	90% or higher	A-
9 or more	AND	80% or higher	B-

After the base grade, additional bumps up the letter-grade scale come from meeting other benchmarks, such as:

Base grade	Edfinity average	Written HW credits	Max possible
A-	90% or higher	4 of 4	A
B-	85% or higher	3 of 4	B+

Sample grade calculations:

LT	CP	Base grade	Edfinity	Written HW	Bumps	Final grade
11	92%	A-	85%	4 of 4	1	A
11	85%	B-	90%	3 of 4	2	B+
9	85%	B-	80%	3 of 4	1	B

Resources:

- Grading for Growth substack
- Robert Talbert's blog
- Center for Grading Reform resources (this links to a repository of actual pointless syllabi for mathematics courses)
- See some sample materials from this presentation on my website