Low-stakes Assessments and Grading

Here are some ideas for maximizing the number of low-stakes assessments you can provide your students, while at the same time keeping the time that you and your TAs spend grading manageable.

1. **Don't grade everything**

Low-stakes assessment is a tool – a means, not an end. There are ways to provide formative assessment without grades, and there are times student work doesn't need to be assessed.

Examples:

> **Simplify your Rubric.** For some assignments, a three-point grading scale (e.g. check-plus/check/minus) or two-point scaled (pass/fail) may suffice.

> **Check for completion and share examples.** Spot check the assignments before the next lecture to get a sense of where students stand. Share and discuss anonymous excerpts from student work in class, explicitly linking successful examples to your criteria for success.

> **Model public grading.** Make expectations transparent by modeling some "public grading." Using a couple of anonymous student papers from past semesters, verbally explain the written feedback, comments, and grade with the class. Consider using a document camera so that the entire class can see the process. This practice gives everyone in the class a chance to see the thought process involved in determining a grade.

> **Grade targeted elements of an assignment.** You can't grade these on "completion," but choose one or two important criteria to focus on in each assignment.

2. **Avoid over-marking**. Provide just enough feedback. While providing some individual feedback is important for building rapport and improving student performance, correcting every grammar mistake or rewriting the assignment for the may not be necessary. For example, consider setting three goals and keep it short: highlighting what was done well (starting out this way is always a good idea), pointing out key mistakes and weaknesses, and providing suggestions for improvement.

3. **Use machine-graded assessments.** Question types such as multiple choice, multiple-correct, and fill-in-the-blank that can be automatically graded are not appropriate for all formative assessment, but can be very effective and efficient means for providing students with practice opportunities and feedback. When instructors take the time to make these questions higher-order, machine-graded questions can be every effective at promoting

critical thinking. Most of the work is on the front end. Look for questions you can re-use (e.g. textbooks, homework systems, open education resources, colleagues, student questions). Many of the technology platforms used for creating quizzes, including Sakai, include opportunities for you to provide richer feedback that extends beyond just letting them know whether their answers are right or wrong.

4. **Grading Software.** Gradescope is a University-supported solution that facilitates the process of administering and scoring course assessments. The program can be used to reduce grading bias, provide more detailed feedback, and keep all assessments better organized. Post-assessment changes made to an assessment are applied automatically to all assessments. The program can be set up to sync automatically with your Sakai course Gradebook. Learn more about how to get started at gradescope.unc.edu.

5. **Shift Assessments to Media Presentation Formats.** Today's students all are carrying video cameras and audio recorders as standard features on their phones. Rather than always having students share their ideas and understanding through a written paper, consider making one or more of those assignments a short individual or group presentation (PPT, video, podcast) that can be shared either online or in recitation sections.

6. **Peer Grading.** Assign students to work together in pairs or small groups to evaluate each other's work. This is can be a helpful step for in-progress assignments or a change of pace for homework evaluation. It's also a great critical thinking exercise for students. Consider assigning points to the quality of the peer assessment, and share exemplars with the class.

   More on the Sakai peer assessment tool at: http://blog.sakai.unc.edu/2014/02/17/new-peer-review-in-sakai/

7. **Self Assessments.** Have students complete a self-assessment using a simple rubric.

8. **Use Rubrics.** Rubrics can greatly simplify the grading process. Consider making the rubrics available to students as part of the assignment. You may be able to save some time by using a free rubric creation site such as iRubric (http://www.rcampus.com/indexrubric.cfm) or Rubistar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php).

9. **Schedule Assignments Carefully.** When you are putting together your course syllabus, make sure you leave ample time between graded assignments.

Sources

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