

Our Grading Contract for RHET 110N

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Class:

Imagine that this wasn't an official course for credit at USF, but instead that you had all seen my advertisement in the paper and were freely coming to my home studio for a class in cooking or kung fu. We would have classes, workshops, or lessons, but there would be no official grading. Of course I'd give you evaluative feedback now and then, pointing out where you've done well and where I could suggest improvement, many of you would help each other, working together to solve problems and evaluate yourselves. But I wouldn't put grades on your individual omelets or performances, or give you an official grade for the course.

I believe that home-studio situation is more conducive to learning than the one we have in this course. Therefore, I will try to *approximate* the evaluative conditions of a home studio course. That is, I will try to create a *culture of support*: a culture where you, your colleagues, and I function as allies, fellow-travelers with various skills, experience, and talents that we offer the group, rather than adversaries working against each other for grades.

Conventional grading often leads students to think more about grades than about writing; to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what you really want to learn, or how you want to communicate something; to be reluctant to take risks with your writing or ideas. Sometimes grades even lead to the feeling that you are working *against* the teacher or having to hide part of yourself from him or her. For these reasons, I am incorporating a contract for grading in our class.

You will get lots of assessments on your writing and other work during the semester from your classmates, and some infrequently from me. Use these assessments to rethink ideas and improve your writing. Always know that I'll read everything and shape our classroom assessment activities around your work, but you will not receive grades directly from me, nor much evaluative feedback. I want you to rely on your colleagues and yourself for assessment and revision advice, but do know that I'm guiding your progress and the assessments you get from your peers. Ultimately, I want you to evaluate continually your progress in the course.

Therefore the default grade for the course is a "B." In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked and if you work through the processes we establish and the assigned work during the semester, then you'll get a "B." If you miss class, turn assignments in late, or forget to do assignments, etc., your grade will drop.

"B" Grades

You are guaranteed a course grade of "B" **if you meet all of the following conditions:**

1. **Attendance/Participation.** You'll attend and fully participate in at least 92% of our scheduled class sessions and their activities and assignments (that's at least 43 sessions). You may miss (for whatever reason) 4 class sessions. For our class, attendance equates to participation. **Therefore it is not enough for you simply to come to class.** If you come to class unprepared in any way (e.g. without work done, assignments unread, etc.), it will be counted as an absence, since you won't be able to participate fully in our activities. This means any informal assignment given, or ones not outlined on our syllabus, fit into this category of attendance and participation.
2. **Lateness.** You'll come on time or early to class. Walking into class late 2 or 3 times in a semester is understandable, but coming habitually late every week is not. If you are late to class, you are still responsible to find out what assignments or instructions were made,

but please don't disrupt our class by asking about the things you missed because you were late.

3. **Sharing and Collaboration.** You'll work cooperatively in groups. Be willing to share your writing, to listen supportively to the writing of others, and, when called for, give full and thoughtful assessments that consistently help your colleagues consider ways to revise according to our class-defined rubrics.
4. **Late/Missed/Ignored Assignments.** You will turn in properly and on time all projects, assessments, evaluations, and other assignments. However, once during the semester, you may turn in **one late assignment** without it affecting your course grade. **All late assignments are due 2 days (48 hours) after their initial due date, no exceptions** (e.g. if an assignment was due on Monday, November 3 at noon, a late assignment must be turned in by noon on Wednesday the 5th).

Because your colleagues in class depend on you to get your work done on time so that they can do theirs on time, **all late assignments turned in after the 48 hour window are missed assignments**. Once you've used your one late assignment, your course grade drops fast since any late assignments after the first one become "missed" (see table below).

Any assignments not done period are considered **ignored**. Regardless of whether you've used your late assignment or not, if two days pass and you have not turned in an assignment due, then it is considered an "ignored assignment." One of these in the grade book means an automatic "C."

5. **All unit projects** need to meet the following conditions:
 - **Complete and On Time.** You'll turn in on time and in the appropriate manner complete essays or assessments that meet all of our assignment guidelines. Late assignments are considered missed – no exceptions. (See #4 above for details on late assignments).
 - **Revisions.** When the assignment is to revise, you will reshape, extend, complicate, or substantially clarify your ideas – or relate your ideas to new things. You won't just correct or touch up. Revisions must somehow respond to or consider seriously your colleagues' assessments. If your revisions aren't substantive, the essay becomes a "late" assignment.
 - **Copy Editing.** When the assignment is for the final draft, your paper must be well copy edited – that is, free from most mistakes/errors/typos (e.g. spelling and grammar). It's fine to get help in copy editing. (Copy editing doesn't count on drafts before the final portfolio.)

"A" Grades

As you see, the grade of B depends primarily on *behaviors* and *responsibility*. Have you *shown* responsible effort and consistency in our class? **Grades of "A," however, depend on quality that's recognizable and articulated clearly by all evaluators of your work.** Thus you earn a B if you put in good time and effort; we should push each other for Bs. But to get an "A" you have to make your time and effort pay off into work of genuine, recognizable excellence that responds

in some way concretely to your colleagues' and my concerns (and also meets the conditions for a B). This means, for instance, that not only is revision of an essay or assignment important, but a certain kind of revision: one that demonstrates a reflective writer who is listening, making decisions, and moving drafts above and beyond our expectations delineated by our evaluation rubrics, which are already high at the "B" level.

Notice that for grades up to B, you don't have to worry about anyone's judgments or standards of excellence, how any of us translate our rubrics and your use of them, or necessarily what revision decisions you decide to make; for higher grades you do. We'll have class discussions about excellence, rubric translations, audience responses, and how to respond to divergent and conflicting assessments. Your final portfolio will play a big role in decisions about excellence in your writing and revision.

Additionally for an "A" grade, you are expected to do consistently helpful assessments and evaluations for your colleagues that demonstrate two important things:

- an assessor who is trying to be *more critical* each time she assesses someone's writing or reads a text (this includes the texts you assess for your use in your own writing), demonstrating that even in your assessment practices you're learning about writing; and
- an assessor who consistently helps her colleagues revise their work by consciously pointing to our rubrics and offering ways to rethink things in drafts, responding to our class' concerns about what's most helpful in assessments.

Grades Lower Than B

I hope no one will aim for lower grades. The quickest way to slide to a "C," "D," or "F" is to miss classes and show up without assignments. This much is nonnegotiable: you are not eligible for a grade of "B" unless you have attended at least 92% of the class sessions (see also #1 above), and met the above numbered requirements.

	# of Absences	# of Late Assigns.	# of Missed Assigns.	# of Ignored Assigns.
A	4 or less	5*	0	0
B	4 or less	5*	0	0
C	5 or less	6	1	0
D	6 or less	7	2	1
F	7 or less	8 or more	2	2 or more

One Plea

Because we all realize that life isn't perfect and that each semester does not always go according to our plans, I offer you one plea that you can make to me to change your progress in the course. For instance, you might plea to get a late or missed assignment removed from your record so that you may still meet our contract, etc. **Anyone can make a plea to me once during the semester.** However, there must be some kind of special or extenuating circumstances that warrants the plea. You may not plead a case just because you want something removed from your record.

***By staying in our course, you agree to all of the above terms, and I agree to keep track of the above details responsibly and enforce them democratically.**