

# **To Grade Or Not To Grade: Hybrid Assessment Through Grading Contracts**

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# Writing Fiction & Poetry

- Spring of 2020
- 300 level English course
- 12 students
  - Five English majors, two history majors, two communication majors, three others
- Asynchronous, 16-week online course
- Five online writing workshops
- Six project elements

# Course Outcomes

1. Develop the ability to communicate ideas in multiple creative genres.
2. Construct a writing process including idea generation, drafting, and revision.
3. Analyze the writing processes of other writers, both published and students.
4. Name and demonstrate the qualities of effective poetry and fiction writing.
5. Explain critical components of published works and appropriate publication requirements.
6. Appraise and respond to the work of peers.

# Course Considerations

- Advanced level of the course
- Two required prerequisites (fiction class & poetry class)
- Uncertainty in backgrounds and knowledge
- Differing goals for the course work
- Creative aspect of the work

# Contract Grading: Theoretical Basis

Peter Elbow and Jane Danielewicz's 2009 discussion of grading contracts in “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Teaching and Learning” from *College Composition & Communication*

Asao Inoue's 2005 articulation of a shared assessment model in “Community Based Assessment Pedagogy” in *Assessing Writing*

# Contract Grading: Hybrid Model

“We don't get rid of grading entirely, but our contract radically reduces it” (Danielewicz and Elbow 2).

The use of letter grades within the contract system is common, yet it creates a sense of hybridity in expectations.

# Contract Grading: Hybrid Model

“give students written evidence... to keep this unusual promise to award a B for doing things rather than for writing quality” (Danielewicz and Elbow 3).

I created a basis for the grading contract that included eight elements that the students were expected to complete or uphold throughout the semester in order to earn a final letter grade of a B in the class.

# Contract Grading: Eight Elements

1. Not miss more than a week's worth of class work.
2. Meet due dates and writing criteria for all major assignments including the five writing workshops, author profile, and literary events.
3. Give thoughtful peer feedback during workshops and work faithfully with their group on other collaborative tasks (e.g., sharing drafts, commenting on drafts, peer editing, online discussion boards, answering peer questions).
4. Sustain effort and investment on each draft of all compositions.
5. Make substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up.
6. Copy-edit all final revisions of main assignments until they conform to the conventions of the appropriate language for the piece.
7. Attend a conference with the teacher to discuss the contract and course work.
8. Submit their mid-term reflection and final portfolio.



# Contract Grading: Hybrid Model

“provide the structures for my students to create a rubric, re-think it, write from it, use it to assess each other, and, of course, reflect continually upon all these practices” (Inoue 221).

I integrated Inoue’s idea of co-creating the assessment tool with the students, as I wanted the contract process to be a discussion instead of a mandate. In individual conferences at the beginning of the semester, the students and I discussed four additional elements, in addition to the eight, that they wanted to use as personal goals throughout the semester. We then added those four elements to that student’s contract as the individual expectation for them to earn an A in the class.

# Contract Grading: Four Elements

To earn an A in the course, the undersigned agree to the following four elements\* that go above and beyond the work outlined above based on expectations and assignments listed in the course syllabus:

1. Composing fully developed plot lines throughout the short stories
2. Use of three poetic forms throughout the semester
3. Creating characters with depth and believable characteristics
4. Completing all major work by set deadlines

\*Items listed as an example

# Contract Grading: Full Contract

## Grading Contract: ENGL 329 // Spring 2020

This contract is adapted from the article "[A Unilateral Grading Contract](#)" by Peter Elbow with Jane Danielewicz and must be signed and agreed upon in person. In order to earn at least a B in the course, students must do the following:

1. Not miss more than a week's worth of class work.
2. Meet due dates and writing criteria for all major assignments including the five writing workshops, author profile, and literary events.
3. Give thoughtful peer feedback during workshops and work faithfully with their group on other collaborative tasks (e.g., sharing drafts, commenting on drafts, peer editing, on-line discussion boards, answering peer questions).
4. Sustain effort and investment on each draft of all compositions.
5. Make substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up.
6. Copy-edit all final revisions of main assignments until they conform to the conventions of the appropriate language for the piece.
7. Attend a conference with the teacher to discuss the contract and course work.
8. Submit their mid-term reflection and final portfolio.

Failure to consistently meet one of these items will result in a C in the course. Failure to consistently meet two of these items will result in a D in the course. Failure to consistently meet more than two of these items will result in a failing grade in the course.

To earn an A in the course, the undersigned agree to the following four elements that go above and beyond the work outlined above based on expectations and assignments listed in the [course syllabus](#):

1. Composing fully developed plot lines throughout the short stories
2. Use of three poetic forms throughout the semester
3. Creating characters with depth and believable characteristics
4. Completing all major work by set deadlines

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Professor Signature & Date

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Student Signature & Date

# Contract Grading: Hybrid Model

“I try to coach [the students] toward sound assessment practices and active learning stances” (Inoue 221)

“We are in fact engaged in critical teaching” (Danielewicz and Elbow 4)

As I implemented a hybrid model of contract grading within as a system of assessment, I found that I occupied a more coach-like role throughout the majority of the rest of the semester.

# Contract Grading: Student Response

“At first, I remember being intimidated and confused by the contract form of grading because it was new, and I did not know what was expected of me since the standards for measuring did not follow the conventional rubric of other classes. It was challenging to assess myself in the beginning and what things I wanted to improve, but I enjoyed having the decision.

Since I had chosen, I felt more motivated and put more effort into my writing. My mentality was different for the assignments, too, because I knew that I could explore more as long as it aligned with the contract. That agreement was assuring throughout the ups and downs of the writing process. The contract made the course more personal and goal-oriented which was valuable for stepping into my own creative writing as well as holding myself accountable.”

Stephanie LeVasseur, Senior English & Writing Majors

# Works Cited

Danielewicz, Jane, and Peter Elbow. “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 2009, pp. 244–68.

Inoue, Asao. “Community-Based Assessment Pedagogy.” *Assessing Writing*, no. 9, Science Direct, 2005, pp. 208–238.

# Thank You!

Thanks so much for your time and attention!

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