

7 Things to Know About Alternative Grading

1. What it is

Alternative grading is an overarching term for assessment that gives students meaningful feedback about their learning so that learning is the focus over grades and points. It includes ungrading, grading for growth, mastery grading, self-assessment, revision, group testing, etc. Alternative grading attempts to address the inequities typically associated with the traditional grading paradigm.

2. How it works

The [Grading for Growth](#) blog provides a good introduction to implementing student-centered grading practices including un-grading, mastery grading, standards-based grading and more.

3. Who's doing it

Several CSU instructors are already incorporating alternative grading into their teaching. In Spring 2023, TILT started a community of practice focused on alternative grading for instructors interested in (or currently employing) alternative grading. Some institutions that use alternative assessment practices include Brown University, Hampshire College, Antioch University, Sarah Lawrence College, Alverno College, Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Prescott College, Evergreen State College, and Reed College. Most medical schools have adopted a pass/fail grading system.

4. Why it's significant

- When the focus is moved away from grades and points, students can focus on learning through feedback and revision, informing students of where they excel and identify areas of growth that can be corrected/revised in an upcoming assignment. For more information, read [Feedback or Feedforward? It's All About the Timing.](#)
- Traditional grading, especially in the form of two mid-terms and a final, is not supportive of marginalized students, neurodiverse students, or students with learning disabilities, [Teaching More by Grading Less \(or Differently\)](#)
- Alternative grading and “ungrading” can be started in [small steps](#) and does not require an immediate overhaul of your course. It can be implemented within existing structures/systems.

5. The downsides

- It can take extra work up front to redesign your course. (It can be implemented in stages.)
- It can take extra work and a bit of creativity to set up the Canvas gradebook for alternative grading practices.
- It may feel challenging to get buy-in from students or colleagues.

6. Where it's going

Alternative grading practices and the conversation around reevaluating traditional grading continues to gain momentum across higher education. For more information, read [To Help New Students Some Colleges Are Eliminating Grades](#)

7. The implications for your classroom

- You *can* hold students accountable and have high expectations with non-traditional grading practices.
- Getting students involved in grading and establishing grading criteria supports self-directed learning.
- Alternative grading practices often keep the focus on learning over “points.”

Join the *TILT Community of Practice on Alternative Grading*

Contact jennifer.todd@colostate.edu for more information.