

Student Grade Sheets

How to Keep Track of Student Progress and Minimize Teacher-Generated Grading Errors

(Excerpted from *A-Academics' Simplified Organizational System*)

By *Mick Rosenblum*

Easy-to-use Grade sheets are an integral component of any student's macro-organizational system. Simply filing old assignments and assignment sheets will not help a student to know where he or she stands (grade-wise) in a particular class. Our discussion of the use of a grade sheet would be both incomplete and inadequate if I did not take a moment to stress the extreme importance of keeping track of every grade and all points earned in every course. The following are the most important reasons why students must maintain their own sets of records:

- 1. Maintain accurate grade records to determine course progress and standing*
- 2. Maintain accurate grade records for midterms and finals study-time.*
- 3. Maintain accurate grade records simply because teachers make mistakes.*

Let's take a look at each of these reasons in some detail. First of all, it should seem obvious that any student working to earn any particular grade in any particular course should, at all times, be aware of his or her standing in that course. Wouldn't you know it; the typical student has nothing but a vague notion of his grades and is usually shocked when the grade reports arrive. Have you ever had following insightful mid-semester conversation with a student?

"How are you doing in math so far this semester?"

"Ok."

"How are you doing in English?"

"Ok."

"Well, how are you doing in history?"

"Ok."

"How about Science?"

"Ok."

"How are you doing in wood shop?"

"I'm not taking wood shop."

"I know; I was just making sure you are awake!"

With a grade sheet in place (and used properly) for each course, a parent and student will both know at a glance where the student stands at any time during the semester. This will allow the student to know exactly where to apply more effort and will help ensure that the following conversation never takes place at your home:

"We just received your grades for this semester. I thought you said you were 'ok' in all of your courses! These grades are far from ok!"

"I don't know what happened! I thought I was doing ok. It's not fair. It's not my fault. There must be some mistake. The teacher must have made a mistake!"

Well, if the teacher made a mistake, let me see all of your graded papers for this semester!"

"Well, er, I don't exactly have all of my papers.

"Where are they?"

"Um, uh, I guess I threw them away."

But, in an effort to be a fair and trusting parent, you meet with the teacher to determine whether or not the teacher really *did* make a horrible error that left your hard-working child with a devastating "D" instead of the "ok" grade that he was convinced he had earned. The following embarrassing conversation is takes place more frequently than you may think:

"Mrs. Jones, Bobby has told us that you may have made an error in computing his grades. He tells us that there is no way that he earned a 'D' in your course. Could you double check your grade book?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Roberts, just one minute please. Ah, here are Bobby's grades. Hmmm, I see that he failed to turn in fifty-percent of his assignments this semester and failed four out of six tests and ten of twenty quizzes. Quite frankly, he actually deserved an 'F'. I gave him a 'D' out of compassion. I would hate to see him fail. He has so much potential."

"Why weren't we told sooner about Bobby's dismal performance? Maybe we could have done something about it before it was too late!"

"Mrs. Roberts, all of this was detailed in each of the progress reports the school sent home with Bobby this semester."

Knowing where a student needs to apply more effort is just one of the reasons why it is imperative that students keep track of every grade and, indeed, every point they earn in each of their courses. Another important reason involves midterms and finals preparation. If a student does not know exactly where he or she stands in any course at any time, then how can a student

determine how much study time to devote to a midterm or final? Now, you might believe that a student should always put forth a maximum effort of study for any midterm or final exam, but that is not always a good policy!

Let me explain this rather perplexing concept by presenting the following example. A few years ago, as I was helping a college student prepare for finals, the student told me that she had a “B” in her Algebra course and wanted to work really hard to bring the grade up to an “A.” After calculating her point total and comparing it to the teacher’s grading scale, however, I determined that the student could neither improve her grade to an “A” in the course nor drop to a “C.” In other words, she was indelibly locked into her “B” grade. My advice to her was to take our calculations to her teacher and, if the numbers were to agree with the teacher’s records, ask the teacher if it were permissible, under these conditions, for the student to skip the final altogether. Another option would have been for the student to take the final without any preparation so long as the teacher understands that the dismal final performance was the result of the student’s desire to devote all of her study time to those courses upon which she could genuinely improve.

The point of this story is that had the student not meticulously recorded her grades, she would have devoted several days of study in vain. Now, some of you may argue that if the student *had* studied for the final, she would certainly have reinforced her knowledge of Algebra . . . and you would be right. But she would also have had to devote less time to other courses whose grades she could have improved. Ultimately, she was able to boost her grade point average by *not* studying for the Algebra final! This story illustrates yet another important reason why every student must keep track of his or her grades. When midterms and finals come around, wouldn't it be nice to know exactly how much time to allot to each exam (and, perhaps, which exams to ignore altogether)? Remember . . . your GPA may depend upon the accuracy of your records!

Incidentally, I would like to take a moment to mention the notion of curved grades. Most students have heard of a grading curve, but the vast majority of students have only a vague idea of the structure of or the reasons behind it. In a nutshell, a bell-shaped curve will shove the majority of students' grades into the "C" range. The "A"s and "B"s will reside on the upper tail, while the "D"s and "F"s will fall onto the lower tail. This system "protects" many of the students who would otherwise have received "D"s by shifting them into the "C" region of the curve and may, in some cases, resolve certain discrepancies inherent in the test itself. Unfortunately, that same “protection” can give students a false impression of the extent of the knowledge that they have gained from a course. A student who has received a letter grade of “C” in particular course, might naturally assume that he or she has assimilated an “average” amount of information when, in fact, he or she may have learned little or nothing at all!

The last, but certainly not the least important reason for a student’s keeping track of his or her grades is the fact that teacher’s (human beings) make mistakes. When a teacher makes an error in recording a student’s grade, the student may unknowingly pay the very dear price of accepting a lower grade than he or she deserves. I remember an incident in which one of my top students was given a “B” in a course instead of the “A” he had actually earned. The reason for the error was the fact that teachers’ grade books are designed to list student grades in a rather

long line across the two separate pages of the book. In order to read a particular student's grades, teachers often use a rubber band to underscore the long line of grades in the grade book. This particular teacher had inadvertently placed the rubber band at an angle with one end beneath my student's name and the other end beneath another student's final grade! Had my student not kept track of his grades, he might not have been aware of the error. Unfortunately, it is sad but true that most students have only a vague notion of their grades at any particular time, and when a teacher makes a mistake, the "typical student" will pay the price.

Now that you know the importance of keeping a careful list of the grades and points you have worked so hard to earn, let me give you an easy way to do just that. On the following page, you will find an example of a grade sheet. You can design one of these sheets yourself with your spread sheet program or via the tables feature in your word processing program or you can obtain a copy by contacting me via email or telephone (just visit a-academics.com). The rest is easy. Once you have obtained a copy of the grade sheet, simply prepare one for each course in which you are currently enrolled.

To prepare the grade sheets, first write the name of the course, the current year, and the current semester on the lines provided. Next, I recommend you punch three binder holes on the *right* side (as opposed to the usual left-side holes) and tape the grade sheets to the inside of each course's subject divider. If you do this correctly, you should be able to flip over any subject divider and find the appropriate grade sheet facing you on the left side of the binder. Then, simply record the grades, scores, etc. in the spaces provided. I encourage you to set up the grade sheets exactly as I have described so that you can easily find them. Students who skip the taping process and merely place the grade sheet atop all of the other papers in the binder will soon discover that the grade sheet has magically "disappeared" beneath a stack of papers never to be seen (or used) again.

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