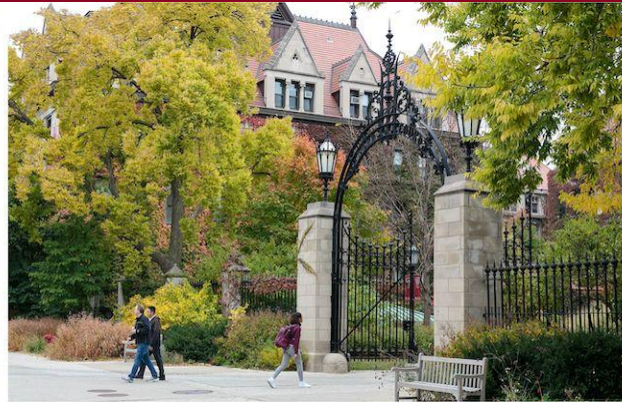


SPECIFICATIONS GRADING



Specifications Grading

- The “specifications” in specifications grading refers to coming up with detailed *specifications* that must be met in order for the student to receive a passing score in an individual assignment (which are graded Pass/Fail)
- These specifications are shared with the students. There are no “secret rubrics”.



Specifications Grading

- There are many ways to implement specifications grading, but I'll focus on three aspects we've found particularly useful:
 - Using Qualitative Scores
 - Transparency in Grading
 - Resubmissions
- These are arguably inextricable: remove just one, and specs grading won't work as well.



Qualitative Scores

- A traditional 0-100 scale is not ideal for conveying feedback on a student's learning.
 - If you get 85 points on an assignment... is that good? Is that bad? What if everyone in the class scored higher than you?
- It is also an imperfect way to measure mastery.
 - A student with a final score of 95 presumably has achieved higher mastery than a student with a final score of 60.
 - But given two students who scored 89.43 and 90.07, is the latter really “0.64 units of student learning” better than the former? If we set the threshold for an A- at 90, does the former really deserve a B+?
- Alternate assessment techniques like specifications grading typically rely on qualitative scales as a way to provide meaningful feedback, as opposed to being a purely evaluative tool.



Qualitative Scores

- One scale we like (and have been using) is the ESNU scale:
 - Excellent / Exceptional / Exemplary
 - Satisfactory
 - Needs Improvement / Not Yet Satisfactory
 - Unsatisfactory / Ungradable / Unassessable
- Conveys level of mastery. Coupled with feedback and resubmissions, allows student to focus on their learning (and the improvements required to achieve more mastery)
- These qualitative scores can be mapped to letter grades in a more meaningful way (e.g., an A student could be one that submitted 9 out of 10 homeworks at an Excellent level)



Qualitative Scores

- Specs grading is usually based on an all-or-nothing approach: either all specifications are met (resulting in a Pass), or the student receives a Fail.
 - But we can use finer-grained variants like the ESNU scale.
- Ideal if institution uses P/F, otherwise requires a system for mapping to letter grades
 - Well-defined performance levels for each letter grade
 - No need to curve
 - Common strategy in specs grading: creating bundles of assignments, aligned with learning objectives of the class. The more bundles you complete, the higher your final grade.



Transparency in Grading

- For individual assignments, the specs provide transparency on how that assignment is going to be graded.
- More than just the individual assignments: the way in which a student's grade will be determined should be *fully transparent* from the first day of class.
 - You commit to a specific formula for mapping individual scores to a letter grade, and stick with that formula.
- At any point in the quarter, a student should be able to easily self-assess how they're doing in the class, and what grade(s) they are on track to obtain.
 - No curving or "discretionary points"

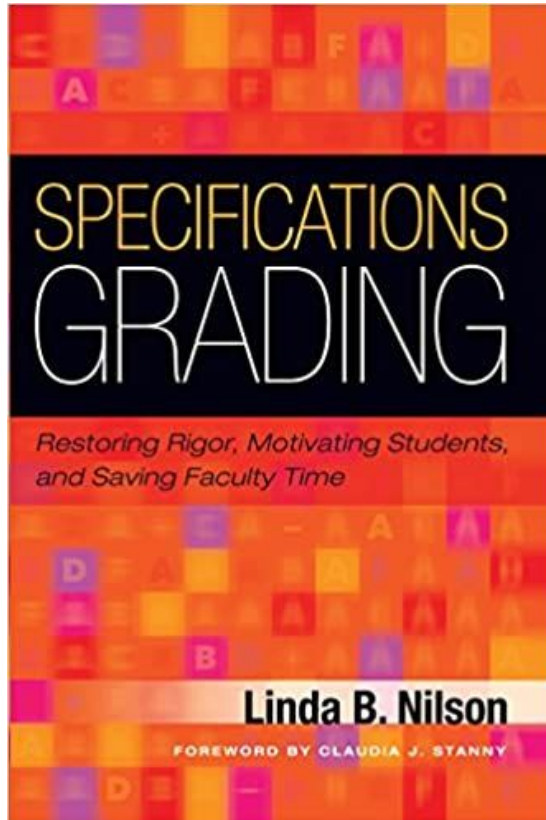


Resubmissions

- Alternate assessment techniques tend to focus on lowering the stakes of each individual piece of work.
 - Doesn't mean you have to lower your standards!
 - It means that no single assignment should have the potential to tank a student's grade.
- A common way of lowering the stakes is allowing students to resubmit their work to improve their score.
- Guiding principle in specifications grading:
high standards + low stakes
 - High bar for "P" → ensures learning objectives are met
 - Multiple opportunities for attainment → lots of small assignments + opportunity for resubmission



Specifications Grading



Nilson, Linda B.
**Specifications Grading:
Restoring Rigor, Motivating
Students, and Saving
Faculty Time.** Stylus, 2015,
<https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12524728>



SPECIFICATIONS GRADING

