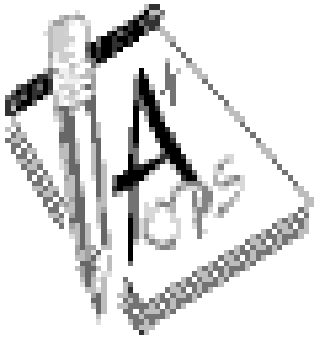
Overview

Grades for students enrolled in the Omaha Public Schools shall be based on the achievement of the district-wide/state content standards, which specify what students should know and be able to do. Standards will be the same across schools and classrooms teaching the same courses in the Omaha Public Schools. These grading premises and practices are intended to ensure students have the knowledge and skills necessary for the next level of a course, the next grade or readiness for college or the workforce.

Grading Premises

1. Assessment is one of the three components of standards-based education (SBE). The other two components of SBE are curriculum and instruction. The premises in this section and the practices which start on page 3 are focused on the assessment component of SBE with limited reference to the OPS Instructional Framework (the instruction component of SBE).
2. **The OPS Instructional Framework is the Gradual Release of Instruction (Modeled, Shared, Guided and Independent) with literacy strategies across all content areas with consistent procedures and routines.** The Gradual Release of Instruction segments the lesson into the smaller components of: modeled, shared discussion, guided practice and independent practice. Focusing on one segment of learning at a time helps students become successful. Chunking the lesson into 10-20 minute segments with descriptive feedback during modeled, shared, guided and independent practice allows students to grasp and retain the content. Students and adults struggle with learning when the content is modeled (direct instruction/lecture) and then given as independent practice. Rather, all parts of the lesson should be present (modeled, shared, guided and independent) to optimize learning. Not including shared discussion and guided practice results in a decrease in retention of the content by the learner which reduces student achievement.
3. Examples of strong and weak work (anchor papers/samples of student work) help students understand how to achieve learning goals. Samples of work should be provided as appropriate during the modeled segment of the lesson. Students are able to increase the quality of their work when they see models or examples of student work with a rubric or proficiency scale for that assignment.
4. A proficiency scale is holistic and defines criteria for measuring student learning on standards. Student grades are determined by evaluating evidence of student learning against the proficiency scale for the learning goal/standard rather than comparing to other students. Standardized proficiency scales have been developed for use by teachers and distributed by Curriculum & Learning. These scales will support teachers as they instruct students and determine grades.
5. Teachers may also create analytic rubrics if needed for specific assignments based upon the proficiency scales. The difference between a holistic proficiency scale and an analytic rubric is: a rubric is specific to the project, task or assignment whereas the proficiency scale is very broadly written and can encompass an entire standard. Teachers can use the broader written scale to write several specific rubrics for projects, tasks and assignments under the content standard proficiency scale.
6. Both proficiency scales and rubrics are referenced during the modeled portion of the lesson.

7. Formative assessment occurs daily in our classrooms. The primary purpose of formative assessment is to support student growth and improvement toward the learning goal and to help teachers diagnose and respond to student needs. This may include providing descriptive feedback and re-teaching which is often done during the shared and modeled phases of a lesson.
8. Regular descriptive feedback is essential to student improvement. Specifically, descriptive feedback indicates to students what was correct or incorrect and how to improve his/her work. Descriptive feedback generally occurs during the shared and guided segment of the lesson.
9. Students are empowered and motivated when given the opportunity to monitor and reflect on their own progress and develop a plan for achievement. Student tracking of goals and achievement increases student motivation and completion of work. Student tracking of grades usually occurs during the summary of the lesson.
10. Coursework is the assignments, projects and tasks that are given to students to complete. Examples of coursework include: reading assignments, short answer essays, story problems, completion of a graphic organizer, a research paper or other assignments that are purposefully designed to enhance the learning of the content.
11. Coursework is a part of the grade when it is used as a formative or summative project or assignment. Coursework is not a part of the grade when it is done for practice.
12. Students are encouraged and expected to complete coursework to achieve. Teachers and parents should set high expectations for the completion of student work.
13. Learning is developmental, and achievement increases with time and opportunities. Most students need 5-7 exposures to new knowledge for that information to move to long term memory. The end of learning is the best indicator of student knowledge.
14. Grading should be fair, consistent, and meaningful. This occurs when all teachers use a standardized grading policy, the OPS proficiency scales, and leveled assessments. As a professional development opportunity, teachers should work together when possible to score student work to improve their consistency of scoring (inter-rater reliability).
15. Student grades are based on evidence from quality, leveled assessment tasks.
16. Final grades and assessment results help to measure the effectiveness of classroom instruction.
17. Assessment results are used to communicate achievement to students, parents, the district and others.
18. Assessment results may identify and group students for certain educational pathways or programs.
19. Grades are not based on one test or project, but on a meaningful collection of evidence about the learning goal which could include tests, projects, demonstrations, observations, essays or questioning. The focus of classroom instruction is on the progression of student learning through the unit of study and what the student knows and can do at the end of learning. Evidence of learning is used to determine the score for the unit of study.



Grading Practices

Purpose and Intended Use:
These are the specific practices that teachers will use for assessment and grading. Standardized grading practices provide specific clear learning goals for students, parents, teachers and administrators of what a student must know and be able to do to master the content of a course. They allow teachers to be consistent with common best practices for grading based upon educational research. Most importantly, they provide tremendous clarity for students and families as to what the grading criteria and expectations are between and amongst teachers, courses, and schools.

Non-academic Factors:
Effort, attendance, and behavior are tracked separately from progress on academic standards. When factored into the final grade, non-academic factors will be placed in the life skills category and weighted at 5%. (This is for the 2011-2012 school year and will be phased out for 2012-13.)

Practice:
The role of practice is to assist the student in developing knowledge and skills effectively and efficiently during the unit of study. Practice work helps guide the learning process by providing teachers with the opportunity to provide frequent, timely and specific descriptive feedback to students without penalty. Practice work may frequently not be scored. If it is assessed, scores on practice work are not a part of a student's grade. Practice work may be expected to be completed in class or outside class. Some examples of practice include: student answers on white boards and response cards, a limited number of practice problems, bell work, or exit ticket activities.

Coursework Types:
Coursework may be practice work, formative assignments/assessments, or summative assignments/assessments, and some coursework may be expected to be completed outside of school. Examples of those three forms of assignments are:

- **Practice** assignments are short and brief. They are done to learn a new skill or to gain initial content knowledge, e.g. student responses on white boards, 3-4 math problems, keyboarding exercises, diagramming sentences, checking and recording resting heart rate etc. Practice assignments are not generally graded for accuracy (descriptive feedback will be provided in class) and are not a part of the grade.

- **Formative** assessments/assignments are done for learning. They are minor assignments, e.g. a three paragraph essay, written responses to guiding questions over an assigned reading, completion of a comparison contrast matrix etc. Formative assignments are graded for accuracy and descriptive feedback is provided.

- **Summative** assessments/assignments are major end of learning unit tests or projects, e.g. a research paper, an oral report with a power point, science fair project. Summative assignments are graded for accuracy.

All coursework will be assessed based on the level of learning achieved by the student as defined by the proficiency scale.

Coursework Amounts:
Coursework that is expected to be completed at home should average no more than 10 minutes per day times the student's grade level. These minutes reflect the total minutes of coursework per day for all subjects. This is a broad estimate that will vary dramatically depending upon the courses taken, the speed of completion of tasks, student ability to work independently outside of class, the number of study halls, and the amount of time provided in class for coursework.

Proficiency Scales:
Proficiency scales provide meaningful criteria that can be used to evaluate evidence of student learning toward a standard. Proficiency scales are standardized at the district level for each course, and they are broadly written to allow teachers to use the same scale for multiple assignments/projects. Teachers will use proficiency scales for every learning goal/content standard. All formative and summative work that is scored is based on the level of learning achieved. Work that is graded will be scored at levels zero through five, not with a letter grade. Proficiency scales should be available to students and parents by posting them in the classroom and publishing them in a course syllabus or on the teacher's website.

Rubrics:
Rubrics may be created by teachers at times for added clarity for students. Rubrics are scoring guides that the teacher creates that are specific to an assignment, a skill, or a project and are based upon the levels in the proficiency scale for that content area. Proficiency rubrics should be available to students and parents by posting them in the classroom and publishing them in a course syllabus or on the teacher's website.

Samples of Student Work:
Samples of student work that are both strong and weak should be provided by teachers and examined by students so that expectations for the basic, proficient, and advanced levels of learning on the proficiency scale or rubric are clear.

Learning Goals:
Teachers should provide clear expectations so students specifically know their learning goals. Teachers and students are asked to write learning goals using student-friendly language for a clearer understanding of expectations. This could be done by rephrasing the expectation as "I can…."

Leveled Assessments:
All graded assignments, projects and assessments will have basic, proficient, and advanced levels of learning to ensure rigor and to ensure that students can reach the highest possible level. Scores are composed of assignments, projects and assessments that have the following three levels:

- **Level three (Basic)** tasks are basic recall and simple skills and include Bloom's knowledge and comprehension levels.

- **Level four (Proficient)** tasks (the target of instruction) consists of complex knowledge and skills and includes Bloom's levels of application and analysis. Teachers will demonstrate and provide examples of synthesis, and evaluation so that students can complete level five tasks with new content.

- **Level five (Advanced)** tasks allow students to apply their knowledge and skills to new or related situations or scenarios. Level five tasks start with application, analysis, and move into synthesis and evaluation. Examples are directly taught and modeled in level four so that students can extend their thinking to new situations and applications.

Every assignment, project and assessment will contain all levels of learning to ensure that students are given the opportunity to earn an advanced score on all assessments counted in the grade.

Group Grades:
Group grades are not utilized. Students will receive individual grades on all projects based upon the work that each student completed.

Bell Curve:
Grading is never based on the bell curve. Grading on a curve is not based upon an individual student's work and should never be used.

Extra Credit:
There is no extra credit. Assignments, projects and assessments are evidence of student mastery on the learning goal and content standards.

Weighted Categories (formerly folders):
Teachers will place scores for evidence of student learning for formative and summative coursework in content standard categories that are weighted (determined by the district with teacher input). The final score for each of these content standards categories will then be averaged to obtain the student's final grade.

Posted Scores/Grades:
Scores are proficiency levels on an individual assessment. A grade is the final score for the course. Scores will be updated every other week in Infinite Campus. In addition, teachers will also communicate to students the updated progress grades biweekly. Teachers will determine how to best do this to keep student progress grades confidential. Teachers may choose to post grades using a printed list with students identified by using the end of the student ID number and randomly change the order of the student numbers each time it is posted; or by having short individual conferences with students during independent practice; or by providing print outs to students individually. It is strongly suggested that students reflect on their learning, set goals for improvement and chart their progress. This, in turn, motivates students to improve.

Checkpoints and Final Due Dates:
For larger projects, student learning will be chunked into manageable segments with mid-unit checkpoints and feedback. Final due dates will be posted in the parent portal.

Teachers will let students know the mid-unit check points. For example a science lab may have several stations or work to be completed over eight days. On the fourth day of the science unit, students may be required to have a science notebook review (mid-point check) by the teacher to determine if they are progressing with understanding in a timely fashion.

Parent Portal:
Parents may view student grades on the OPS web-based parent portal. For families who do not have internet access, teachers may mail biweekly grade reports, send reports home with students, have a kiosk or lab at the school available for parent use, or call parents with grade report information. Schools mail home paper copies of mid-quarter progress reports and quarterly report cards to parents every nine weeks.

Student Tracking of Grades:
Teachers are strongly encouraged to have students reflect on their learning, record scores, and develop a plan of action for improvement. Students feel empowered and motivated when given the opportunity to monitor and reflect on their own progress and develop a plan for achievement. Student tracking of goals and achievement increases student motivation and completion of work.

Trend Scores for the End of Learning:
A trend score is a measure of student learning on a learning goal/standard. It is based on the premise that the scores at the end of learning are more accurate indicators of what a student knows and can do. Early scores tend to be lower than later scores and students should not be penalized for early attempts at learning. For this reason, averaging should be avoided.

A trend score is determined by reviewing the series of student scores, but focusing more on the final few scores to find a common score. To calculate a trend score, a minimum of three to five assessments is necessary for each learning goal. When reviewing the last three scores, if one seems out of place, average the last two or three scores to more accurately reflect student learning.

There are a few situations when scores may be averaged. They are the following:

1. If there are only two scores recorded as evidence of learning for the category. It is then recommended that an attempt be made to assess students again for additional evidence of learning before trending. However, if this is not possible, the two scores on the learning goal should be averaged.
2. If the student develops a pattern of not completing assessments/assignments causing insufficient evidence of student learning, the student will receive a zero for the missing work and the scores should be averaged.
3. If the student scores are inconsistent and do not reflect a trend, scores should be averaged.
4. If a curriculum supervisor has indicated that scores will need to be averaged for a learning goal because of the lack of co-variance (learning topics within a goal/category are not interrelated), scores should be averaged.

Redoing/Revising Coursework:
Students will be allowed redos and revisions of coursework for full credit during that unit of study. Scores for student work after retaking, revising or redoing will not be averaged with the first attempt at coursework or assessment but will replace the original student score. Redos and revisions are possible as long as assignments are turned in during the unit of study while a student still has an opportunity to learn and benefit from the learning. When time permits, teachers should allow the redoing or revising of summative assessments.

Students are responsible for completing all coursework and assessments as assigned. Students are expected to complete assessments when given to the class, or if a student was justifiably absent, at a time designated by the teacher. Teachers may schedule students before, during or after school to address needed areas of improvement if not convenient during class. The time and location for redoing, retaking or revising will be done at the teacher‘s discretion in consultation with the student and parent(s).

Late Coursework:
Students will be expected to complete missing coursework. Late coursework will be accepted for full credit until the end of the unit. Once coursework is turned in, the zero will be replaced with the score earned by the student. Late work will not be penalized by a reduction in grade. Work that is not turned in during the unit of study will receive a score of zero. The teacher or school may make exceptions depending upon student circumstances (such as prolonged absences due to illness, etc.).

All units of study should be concluded three to five classes prior to the end of the grading period or that unit of study could be scored in the next grading period.

Missing Coursework:
Work not turned in at all will receive a score of zero. Zeros are used only when multiple efforts to intervene with the student to complete the missing work (including communication with student, parents, offers to help the student, etc.) have failed. In addition to missing work, zeros will also be used to indicate there is no evidence of student learning.

When a student chooses not to complete early attempts at learning and receives a zero for missing assignments, the teacher will average the zeros into the final score.

Transfers:
Teacher discretion with school administration should be used when students transfer from one OPS school to another. Trending should be used whenever possible. Students who transfer from outside of OPS will have their grades from their previous schools averaged with their current scores to most accurately reflect the student’s level of learning.

Late Enrollments for Out of School Students:
Teachers and administrators will need to use professional judgment in determining grades for students who enroll significantly late in the grading period. Determination of grades for late enrollees (who have been out of school) will depend upon the number of days and assignments missed in that grading period that cannot be made up. After school assistance and credit recovery options will need to be considered.

Student Accommodations:
Accommodations are provided to students with special needs without adjusting or reducing grades. Accommodations for students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) or 504 plans may change requirements for quantity of work, time allotted, presentation format, type of evidence, etc. Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations, adjust content or rigor of the material to be mastered, or change the grade calculation. The IEP or 504 plan would list all accommodations for that student.

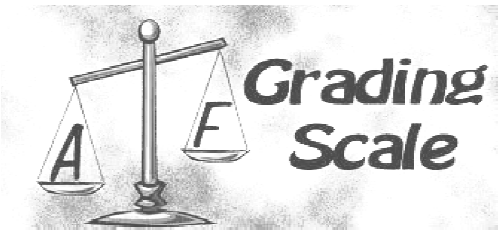
Testing accommodations, adjustments or adaptations for students with IEPs or 504 plans do not change test expectations, the difficulty level, or the constructs or content being measured. Accommodations appropriate for the student should be based on the IEP or 504 plan.

Student Modifications:
Modifications alter course content, assignments and assessments and are not used. Eligible students may receive accommodations (see above), not modifications.

Grading Scale:
Students will receive a proficiency level of: **5**/advanced; **4**/proficient; **3**/basic; **2**/below basic; **1**/failing with an attempt made and; **0**/failing with no attempt made on assignments.

Letter grades are not awarded for individual assignments or assessments. At the end of a grading period, scores will be converted to a letter grade using the secondary OPS grading scale for the 2011-2012 school year.

A = 4.01-5.00
B = 3.01-4.00
C = 2.01-3.00
D = 1.60-2.00
F = 0-1.59



Instructional Practices

Overview of Lesson Planning using the OPS Instructional Framework: The Gradual Release of Instruction:
The most powerful instructional and assessment strategy that raises student achievement is descriptive feedback. Descriptive feedback occurs during the gradual release of instruction as a part of the formative assessment process. It occurs when teachers avoid extended lecture and instead chunk their lessons with transitions every 5-20 minute segments (modeled, shared, guided and independent). Lessons will follow the A+ OPS Lesson Plan Outline.

A+ OPS Lesson Plan Outline

Anticipatory Set:
(4-5 minutes) An introductory question that is meta-cognitive that can be a written prompt or a verbal question from the teacher that requires the student to reflect on prior knowledge and the use of instructional strategies.

Objective/Learning Goal:
(2-3 minutes) A learning goal that is clear to students and posted in the class room and referred to both at the beginning of the lesson during modeled and during the summary of the lesson. The learning goal is written in student-friendly language and leads to the understanding of the standard/learning goal and the criteria for achievement.

Procedures: The Gradual Release of Instruction:

- **Modeled:** (5-7 minutes) The teacher explains and models the strategy, skill or content indicating how it relates to current learning needs and prior knowledge. Students are usually in whole group but may be in small groups. Samples of student work may be shown as well as rubrics and proficiency scales. The teacher may have students take combination notes or complete graphic organizers during this short (5-7 minutes) direct instruction.

- **Shared:** (5-7 minutes) The teacher encourages student participation by asking questions to check for understanding of what was just modeled. Students are usually in whole group, but may be in small groups or pairs (elbow partners). The teacher checks for understanding by asking questions and students may respond with white boards, thumbs up, sideways or down, response cards or individual student answers. The teacher provides descriptive feedback based upon how students answer and then re-teaches as needed.

- **Guided:** (15-50 minutes) The teacher provides small group activities at students' instructional (readiness) level so that students practice using the strategies with the content. Teacher offers support by prompting, questioning and guiding with extensive descriptive feedback and re-teaching individually and in small group. Student learning increases when the teacher provides informal descriptive feedback to the small groups of students as she or he moves about the classroom. For example, students may be divided into three small groups so they can rotate through stations (independent cooperative learning station, technology or silent reading/writing station, and a teacher led "coaching/conferencing" station for re-teaching or extending knowledge). Student learning increases when the teacher can lead one station to provide coaching with extensive descriptive feedback to a small group of students.

- **Independent:** (6-8 minutes) Students work independently applying what they have learned across a variety of situations. Students work with the content using the strategies to make meaning and complete tasks without support or prompting. The teacher has the students involved in literacy strategies such as writing or reading. Students might work on lab project summaries, research papers, oral presentations, short answer essay questions, and other appropriate independent assignments.

Summary:
(5-8 minutes) The teacher asks the students to reflect on their learning by writing down their major understandings of the learning goal for the lesson. Students should be able to write down their most valuable points of what they learned. Exit tickets may be used, and teachers are strongly encouraged to have students chart their progress by recording their assessment results (if an assessment was returned or evaluated during the lesson).

Flexibility and Adjustments During the Gradual Release of Instruction:
The gradual release of instruction is a flexible delivery model to be used for classroom instruction in all subjects PreK-12. The four stages (modeled, shared, guided and independent) are often repeated throughout the lesson (especially the modeled and shared process which may have several cycles during the lesson). Depending on the schedule, lessons may be structured to take more than one class period. The extended time available in a block schedule will easily accommodate the use of the gradual release during one block. Formative and summative assessments are embedded throughout the gradual release of instruction with re-teaching as needed. The lesson segment times may be adjusted but should never exceed 20 minutes. As noted during a block of time (80 minutes or more), stations can easily occur and multiple iterations of modeled and shared may occur to cover multiple topics.

Descriptive Feedback During the Gradual Release of Instruction:
Teachers will use the gradual release of instruction so that students receive modeled, shared, guided, and independent practice with descriptive feedback throughout the lesson. As a result, students will have multiple opportunities upon receiving descriptive feedback to revise and adjust their work. First attempts at learning are not to be penalized. Students will be given opportunities to refine work based on specific feedback and re-teaching before a final grade for a unit of study is given.

Descriptive feedback (telling students what is correct or incorrect and what specifically to do to improve their work) greatly increases student achievement. Teachers fail to provide descriptive feedback when they move from modeled (direct) instruction to independent practice and skip shared discussion and guided practice. Teachers need to use all four steps of instruction (which includes shared discussion and guided practice) so that large doses of descriptive feedback occur to increase student learning and achievement.

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Omaha Public Schools
Secondary Proficiency Scale 2011-12

Level	Description of Levels	Assignment Scores
Advanced	In addition to a proficient score the student synthesized and evaluated the content.	5 (highest advanced score) 4.5 (midpoint advanced score)
Proficient	No major errors or omissions regarding any of the information and/or processes (simple or complex). Students can make applications and analyze the content.	4 (highest proficient score) 3.5 (midpoint proficient score)
Basic	No major errors or omissions regarding the simpler details and processes, but major errors or omissions exist regarding the more complex ideas and processes. Students have knowledge and comprehension of the content.	3 (highest basic score) 2.5 (midpoint basic score)
Below Basic	With help, a partial understanding of some of the simpler details and processes and some of the more complex ideas and processes.	2 (below basic score)
Failing	Even with help, there is very little comprehension and very little knowledge of the content. But the student did attempt the learning Even with help there is no comprehension or knowledge of the content. But the student did attempt the learning. There is no evidence or demonstration of student learning. Student work is not done or handed in.	1.5 (highest failing score) 1 (midpoint failing score) 0 (lowest failing score)