

Assessment, Grading and Reporting Handbook for Secondary Schools



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Introduction

Education in Saskatchewan is based on curriculum outcomes in various subject areas. Good Spirit School Division has developed a set of guidelines for teachers to use to assess student learning of curriculum outcomes. This handbook is intended to support teachers with the understanding of outcome-based assessment, grading, and reporting practices by providing guidelines for assessing student achievement.

We Believe the primary purpose for assessment and evaluation experiences is to support student learning while informing teacher instruction.

Purpose of Grading Student Outcomes

The renewed Saskatchewan Curricula clearly define what students are to know, be able to do, and understand. It is important that both the formative and summative assessments which are given to students are linked to specific outcomes. It is suggested that the criteria for outcomes are clarified for students using tools such as rubrics, checklists, etc. which include the outcome as well as the corresponding indicators.

The primary purpose for grading should be to **communicate** with students, parents and other stakeholders (Board of Education, the School Division, Post-Secondary Institutions, and the Ministry of Education) about their achievement of learning goals.

The secondary purposes for grading include providing teachers with **information** for instructional planning as well as to provide teachers, administrators, parents and students with information for evaluation of school programs and for student placement.

Grades and other communication about student achievement should be based on high quality evidence. Teachers should be able to describe that evidence and explain how they arrived at any judgments about the quality of student work. (Brookhart, 2009)

Guidelines for Effective Grading

To provide context for the guidelines outlined in this handbook, we look to Ken O'Connor, Anne Davies, and Richard Stiggins to ensure we are employing effective grading practices. O'Connor (2007) states, "... effective grades need to meet four overarching criteria ... they must be consistent, accurate, and meaningful, and must support learning (p. 4)."

Effective grades must be:

- **Supportive of Learning**
 - Create an environment that instills hope.
 - Students should understand that school is about learning with grades being the artifacts of their learning.
 - Grades should reflect and support improved learning.
 - Emphasis should be placed on intrinsic motivation.
- **Consistent**
 - All grading procedures will be linked to curricular learning outcomes/indicators as determined by the Ministry of Education.
 - Grading standards set need to be consistent from teacher to teacher. "Students achieving at the same level should get the same grade regardless of context" and teachers, "... should determine grades in similar ways and apply similar or the same performance standards (p. 5)."
- **Accurate**
 - Formative assessment should not receive a mark but rather feedback, which is timely, clear, specific, and descriptive.
 - Grades must only measure the achievement of students while behaviours such as effort, participation, late assignments, homework completion, etc. are reported separately.

What is Outcome-Based Assessment?

- Grades focus on student achievement only.
- Criteria for success is made clear to learners
- Students have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.
- Triangulation (conversations, observations, products) of summative assessment evidence is utilized.

General Guidelines for Outcome-Based Assessment, Grading, and Reporting

Guideline #1: Outcome-based grading focuses on student achievement of curriculum outcomes.

To measure effectively what a student knows, understands and is able to do, in relation to a curriculum outcome, the grade assigned to an outcome for reporting purposes must be based solely on the student's level of achievement.

Outcome-based grading focuses on the student's ability to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the knowledge or skills outlined in the curriculum outcome. Effort, motivation, and behavior play a vital role to student learning and will be reported separately.

Guideline #2: Provide students with clear expectations of what they need to do to achieve each outcome they will be learning about during a unit of study.

Before students are summatively assessed on an outcome, they need to be aware of what they need to know, understand, and be able to do to show the breadth and depth of their learning. Richard Stiggins (2001) notes, "Students can hit any target that they can clearly see and stands still for them." Provide students with their learning goals at the beginning of a unit or task and give them information about how they will be assessed on those goals through the use of a rubric or something similar to it. This can be in the form of an "I can" statement or learning target so students can clearly understand what is expected from them.

Guideline #3: Involve students in the assessment process.

Students are empowered and motivated by playing an active role in their learning. "The research is clear. When students are involved in the classroom assessment process, they become more engaged in learning." (Davies, 2011. p. 54).

Students should be involved in on-going conversations about their assessment. They are offered choice when appropriate, provided with timely, specific feedback, and are shown anchors or examples of quality work to gain a clear understanding of their level of achievement of an outcome and what is necessary for success. Having students become involved in the co-construction of criteria or rubric development, peer assessment, self-assessment and setting personal learning goals contributes to a thorough understanding of success criteria and allows students to take ownership of their learning.

Guideline #4: Outcome-based assessment practices provide different ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

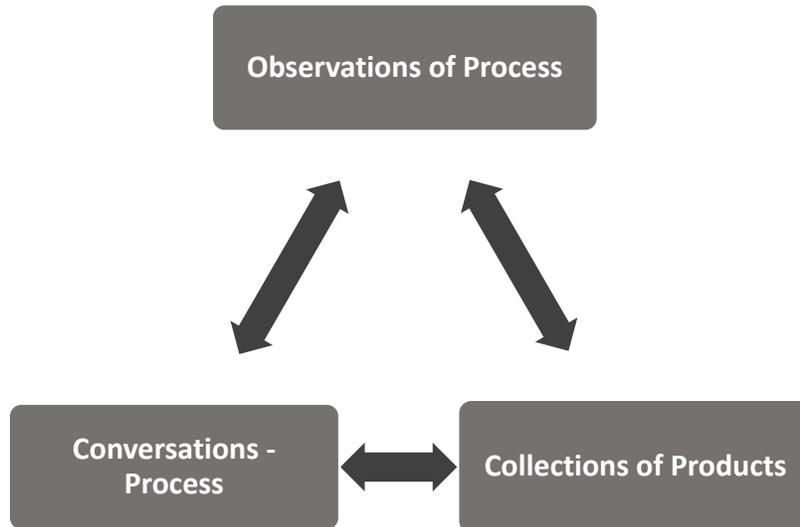
The assessment measure used in outcome-based education is not the same for all students. O'Connor (2007) quotes a section from Manitoba's assessment/grading policy that helps us to understand outcome-based assessment:

All students are given an equal opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do as part of the assessment process. Adaptations ... are available for students *including* students with learning or physical disabilities, to allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, **provided that the adaptations do not jeopardize the integrity or content of the test** (p. 9-10).

A variety of assessment measures are used to account for the diverse learning needs of students. More than one assessment measure may be needed when assessing a classroom of students.

Guideline #5: Data for summative assessment should be triangulated (student products, observations, and conversations).

Anne Davies (2011) talks about the process of triangulation and gathering evidence through observations, conversations, and products. “When evidence is collected from three different sources over time, trends and patterns become apparent, and the reliability and validity of our classroom assessment is increased (p.46).”



Quality assessment uses triangulation of evidence and feedback from teachers, parents, and students themselves, to help educators and students assess the learning that is taking place. Furthermore, it gives information for taking next steps, as well as collecting the evidence needed to account for learning. Samples might include:

Conversations:

Agree/Disagree and why	Anecdotal Records	Answer Specific	Ask a question	Checklists
Class Discussions	Conferences	Conversations	Debate	Group Work
Interviews	Make a comment	Music	Oral Exams	Play/Drama
Podcast	Small group talk	Think-Pair-Share		

Observations:

Assessment Stations	Debate	Demonstrations	Design Project	Exhibits
Experiments	Inquiry Projects	Interviews	Investigation	Lab
Media product	Performance	Presentation	Recital	Re-enactment
Role Playing	Seminars	Simulation	Think-Pair-Share	

Products:

Compositions	Concept Map	Demonstration	Entrance/Exit Slip	Journals
Paragraphs/Essays	Portfolio	Poster	Powerpoint	Pre/Post Test
Presentations	Projects	Quiz/Test/Exam	Research Report	Response Journal
Seminar	Short Answer	Stations	Summarizing	Survey
Video	Written response			

Assessment Tools:

Anecdotal record – ongoing written observations about students’ performance or work samples collected over time.

Anchor – student work samples that correspond to the performance levels set out in a rubric.

Exemplars – samples within the anchor set that represent the expected standard of quality.

Answer Key – shows acceptable answers. Most suited to supply response items.

Checklist – a list of specific skills to be demonstrated during a performance task or attributes required in a product.

Criteria – the standards by which something may be judged or valued. May be set with or without student involvement.

Developmental Continuum – a detailed chart that identifies typical stages of skill acquisition and the observable indicators associated with each stage.

Frequency Scale – a scale used to measure how frequently a desired behavior or attribute occurs.

Rating Scale – a scale that assigns a numerical value to one or more assessment criteria.

Rubric – a set of criteria and performance indicators arranged according to expected levels of performance – Holistic or Analytic

Scoring Guide – a precise explanation of how grades are awarded for specific questions on a test or for specific performance indicators on a product.

The 3 parts of a classroom assessment that work:		
Part 1 Learning Destination	Part 2 Community of Learners	Part 3 Charting the Course
Begin with the end in mind.	Involve students as partners in the assessment process.	Show Proof of Learning
<i>With Students:</i> Explain the purpose Show samples Talk about possible evidence	<i>Get students to:</i> Set up and use criteria Self-assess Seek feedback for learning Set goals	<i>Have students:</i> Collect evidence Select and reflect on evidence Present evidence of learning

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are we refining our assessment practices?

We have a tremendous opportunity in education to address changes in how we view student learning. With changes in the way we understand learning, we know that education must change to accommodate who are learners of today are.

Best assessment practices are based on sound educational research. They are respectful of student learning, empower students to take ownership for their learning, and accurately reflect student achievement. Academic grades report student mastery of learning outcomes, and learning behaviours are reported separately. Outcome-based reporting aligns with our renewed curriculum and can work with non-renewed curriculum by highlighting and reporting on learning objectives.

2. Is homework included in grading?

Homework is intended for students to “practice” the skills required to meet an outcome so it should not be included in the final grade. Homework is most effective when it is used as formative assessment and to adjust instruction. Homework assignments should be designed to be completed independently and should be tied to learning outcomes.

Evidence used in the final grade should come from various summative assessments given at key points throughout as well as at the end of a unit. Homework is important for successful student learning, however, homework completion is reported as a learning behavior.

There are however, occasions when a summative assessment has been started in class and students are required to complete the assessment outside of class time. In these cases, the completion of the homework is not intended as “practice” but rather, it is necessary evidence to determine whether a student has achieved the desired outcome(s).

3. What if a student is late turning in an assignment?

Students have a responsibility for their learning. Teachers use their professional judgment to provide flexibility with deadlines when it is feasible and appropriate. Teachers should also clearly communicate summative assessment due dates to their students throughout each semester. Students are expected to adhere to the due dates and deadlines which when possible, are established together. Various interventions and supports such as establishing flexible timelines, additional assistance, or losing the privilege of unstructured time may be negotiated to assist students with the completion of course work. Educators strive for a balance between fostering growth of student responsibility and providing authentic assessment of student understanding of outcomes that is not weighted with marks that result from learning behaviours. The academic grade will reflect student learning, and learning behaviours such as late assignments are reported separately.

Teachers require sufficient time to accurately assess student work for reporting periods. Therefore, “**outstanding summative assessments**” which are submitted near a teacher’s mark submission deadline for a reporting period, despite a teacher’s best effort, might not be

marked in time to have them reflected in the overall grade. It is left to the discretion of each school staff to define a protective window of time prior to mid-term reporting and final reporting where late summative assessments will not be graded. Teachers may need to record an “incomplete” for the outstanding summative assessment until such time that the assessment (evidence of learning) can be graded. In the event that an amount of time has passed and the authenticity of an assessment is compromised, a teacher using their professional judgment and discretion may decide to assign a different assessment based on the same outcomes.

4. What results in a loss of course credit?

Some work must be completed in a timely fashion within the learning cycle, because learning new concepts may be predicated on mastery of prior learnings. While some late work may be accepted, teachers also have deadlines to submit marks, and need to ensure the authenticity of an assessment. At some point the assigned work may be too late and may require a student to complete a variation of the original assessment to measure understanding of an outcome or it may eventually be reported as incomplete. After documented interventions have been put in place for a student with incomplete summative assessments, the In-School Administrator in consultation with the classroom teacher may determine a student who has not completed or submitted all summative evidence which was required for a course, is a candidate for credit recovery. In the event that a student is provided the opportunity of credit recovery at the end of a semester, it would be expected that the original classroom teacher be responsible for communicating the outcomes for which evidence is still required, however they would not necessarily be responsible for the supervision, grading, and planning involved for the credit recovery. The credit recovery should be completed within a negotiated time frame and accomplished through homework rooms, distance/distributed learning modules, tutorials, etc.

If a student fails to take advantage of negotiated supports throughout the semester and still does not turn in work that is deemed essential to the course, they may be given an incomplete for the course. Interventions and supports offered to students should be documented with the understanding that credit recouping should ideally take place throughout the semester. Students who have not responded to timely interventions throughout the semester are not automatically deemed candidates for credit recovery at a semester’s end. This decision must be made in consultation with the classroom teacher, the administrator and the school RTI team.

5. Can a grade be assigned to classroom participation and effort?

Though effort does impact achievement, it is recorded separately, and/or communicated to the stakeholders in a different way - through a portfolio, conference, phone call, email, etc.

6. Can I use grades to reward extra work?

Extra effort or work submitted early does not reflect the achievement level of the student in relation to the outcome. In order for students to receive a higher grade, there must be evidence of a higher level of achievement. Simply putting forth more effort and completing more work does not necessarily result in deeper understanding (O’Connor, 2007).

7. What if there is academic fraud or plagiarism?

Academic dishonesty is a serious behaviour and must be addressed through various consequences. However, it is not addressed through a grade when reporting on outcomes. The level of achievement must still be determined; therefore students would be expected to redo assignments or complete alternate assignments to demonstrate their understanding and what they are able to do.

8. How do I take student attendance and punctuality into account when grading?

Regular attendance is an essential part of every student's obligation and commitment to learning and is essential for student success. The Education Act (1995) clearly states students and parent(s)/guardian(s) are responsible for regular attendance.

Section 150.3a states, "Pupils shall attend regularly and punctually."

Section 156.1 states, "Every parent, guardian or other person having charge of a pupil who is of compulsory school age shall take all the steps necessary to ensure regular attendance of that pupil."

Student attendance and punctuality should not be included in grades. Grades include only evidence of achievement therefore absences and lates are reported separately. Students are still responsible for course work that is missed due to excused or unexcused absences. Students must assume the responsibility along with their parents/guardians for the results of accumulated absences (vacations, scheduled appointments, illness, extra-curricular activities, etc.) such as, lower or failing grades and an increased homework load. Though teachers have the best interests of their students in mind, it may not always be feasible for a classroom teacher to "catch students up" on all instruction which is missed during an absence or accumulation of absences. It is therefore the responsibility of the student to acquire any materials, resources and instruction which is missed due to an excused or unexcused absence. Students would be expected to attend homework rooms, tutorials, and other supports available within their school to catch up on missed work/instruction. When reasonable and possible to do so, teachers are asked to assist students in accomplishing this.

Absenteeism often affects overall student achievement or makes it impossible to complete or demonstrate proficiency in essential course work necessary to earn credit for the course. Upon the accumulation of multiple absences in one or more courses, resulting in summative assessments being incomplete as well as a lack of understanding in key concepts, a teacher in consultation with the student, parent/guardian, and school Rtl team may determine that it is in the student's best interest to reduce their course load, to increase the likelihood of success in as many credit courses as possible. The course reduction template must be completed in CLEVR for all students who are withdrawn from courses due to accumulated absences.

9. Can I use group projects as evidence of student learning when reporting on outcomes?

Though Group Work can be an effective teaching strategy, group scores cannot be used when determining achievement levels of individual students because, "... the group scores may not accurately reflect the achievement of each student and therefore would be unfair for

some members of the group” (O’Connor, 2007, p. 48). An appropriate assessment for group work would involve students individually demonstrating their understanding and/or ability to perform the outcomes as a follow-up to a group learning activity.

10. Can I use “all” the marks I have collected on quizzes and assignments throughout the unit to come up with a final grade?

It is important to distinguish between those assessments which are intended to occur during the learning process as a means to involve students in monitoring their own learning (formative) and those which are intended to serve as the evidence of achievement related to curricular outcomes (summative). Formative assessments support students as they seek to develop a deep understanding of curriculum outcomes. These assessments also provide teachers with an opportunity to provide valuable feedback to the students. The information gathered during formative assessment is not included in grades because these activities permit students to **practice and refine** their knowledge and understanding of the outcomes. Only marks collected from summative assessment measures are used in grades when they are given during or at the end of a learning process when students have had the chance to fully develop their understanding of the outcomes. These summative assessments “may” be in the form of assignments or quizzes.

11. Why can’t I use a zero in the calculation of a grade?

Giving students a zero for a missing summative assessment results in a grade that does not accurately reflect their level of achievement because there is no evidence of what they understand about the outcome. A zero would suggest that a student “knows” or “does not understand” anything. Rather than using a zero, missing work can be reported as incomplete (INC). The INC would be replaced with a grade when the assessment has been submitted and evaluated. As a last resort, zeros may be assigned if there is no evidence and/or intervention attempts have been unsuccessful. Students may not be given the opportunity to choose a zero over completing the required summative assessments for a unit of study. An accumulation of incomplete work may ultimately result in a loss of credit for a course.

There may be staff who will choose to use a “zero” as a place holder versus an “INC”. This is acceptable provided that students understand that they will receive opportunity to replace the zero when the work is completed.

12. How are final summative grades determined?

A final grade is not determined by only one task or piece of evidence. Teachers use triangulation of evidence, including conversations, observations, and products. If a summative assessment does not ‘fit’ with other evidence and teachers do not feel they have enough evidence to give a grade for an outcome, when feasible and at their discretion, a teacher may assign an alternate performance task to the student so they have an opportunity to demonstrate their learning.

A grade which has been determined by “averaging” typically does not reflect the student’s achievement of targeted outcomes. It is recommended that other measures of central

tendency and the use of professional judgment be exercised when determining a final grade. Teachers should use their professional judgment when determining whether to replace earlier grades with evidence that suggests further learning has occurred.

Final examinations or other culminating assessments will be worth **no more than 25%** of a student's final grade. If the purpose of a final evaluation is for students to demonstrate what they have learned, then all students should be involved.

13. Are Re-dos and Retakes allowed for every summative assessment?

Although it is not always possible to allow students to redo an assignment or assessment for a particular outcome, it can be highly effective to do so. Any work which is redone is at "teacher discretion". Teachers have the right when allowing re-dos and retakes to give alternate assessments, require students to submit plans of relearning, require students to engage in some form of re-teaching of the outcome and to require a parent/guardian signature acknowledging that their child is requiring multiple attempts to achieve an outcome.

When a redo or retake is considered, a plan for improvement must be approved by the teacher before the next attempt is allowed. This should include:

- A timeline;
- What work is required to be done by the student as evidence of additional effort before they get a redo/retake opportunity;
- Attendance at structured support sessions;

In the event that the same student is repeatedly asking for a redo or retake, the teacher should investigate "why" with the student and a parent. Schools may limit the number of redo attempts which are allowed.

14. What is the process for Credit Recovery?

Both the Ministry of Education and Good Spirit School Division have procedures that enable students who have not completed the required outcomes/course work by the end of a semester to recover the credit.

Credit Recovery should occur within the same school year for a class offered in the first semester or within the first 30 days of the following school year (as prescribed by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education). Credit Recovery should be administered for students who receive a final grade of 40% or more in a course. Teachers and administrators should use their discretion for students who obtain grades of 35%-39%.

15. What courses are final exams to be administered in?

Exams are one way for students to demonstrate their understanding. Other assessments could include projects, demonstrations, and other performance tasks.

All high schools must follow the Administrative Procedure 202 (High School Final Exams).

Glossary

Achievement

Ken O'Connor (2007) defines achievement as "... performance measured against accepted published standards and learning outcomes (p. 8)."

Assessment

Assessment is "... the act of gathering information on an ongoing basis in order to understand individual student's learning and needs (Saskatchewan Education, 2010, p. 16)."

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is given during a lesson or unit to gather information about student learning. The information is used to track student progress and make changes to instruction.

Grade

"A grade is the symbol (number or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance (O'Connor, 2007, p. 7)."

Outcome

An outcome is what students should be able to demonstrate with deep understanding as defined by the Saskatchewan curriculum.

Mark

"A mark or score is the number (or letter) given to any student test or performance that may contribute to the later determinations of a grade (O'Connor, 2007, p. 7)."

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is given at the end of a lesson or unit of study to show what students have learned.

Resources

Print Resources

- Davies, A. 2011. *Making Classroom Assessment Work: Third Edition*. Courtenay, BC: Connections Publishing.
- O'Connor, K. 2007. *A Repair Kit For Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Wiggins, G. & J. McTighe. 2005. *Understanding by Design: Expanded 2nd Edition*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Online Resources

- Alberta Education, 2009. [The Alberta Student Assessment Study: Final Report](#).
- Manitoba Education, 2006. [Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind](#).
- Manitoba Education, 2010. [Provincial Assessment Policy Kindergarten to Grade 12: Academic Honesty, Health and Promotion/Retention](#).
- Saskatchewan Education, 2010. [Renewed Curricula: Understanding Outcomes](#).