



THE GRADING RUBRIC EXPLANATION

For All of My Courses



Abstract: This document describes my approach to grading various course assessments (such as essays, problem-based activities, etc.). It highlights the common tasks involved in answering these questions and provides an explanation for the grading system used. It is important that students carefully read the grading rubric and examine the samples provided in order to successfully pass the course.

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Overview of My Grading Criteria

Purpose of Activities and Questions

The grading system described in this document is appropriate for all the different types of questions, problems, and activities that I use in my classes. Specifically, this document will explicate a common grading system for the following types of assessment tasks that I use in my classes: 1) essay questions of differing purposes and depths, 2) in-class and homework activities, and 3) problem-based questions (such as those used in Statistics).

Generally speaking, all course questions, activities, and problems are written to highlight a main concept. They are generally designed to cover a moderate amount of material at a reasonably deep level of understanding. Specifically, questions that ask students to generate examples, integrate ideas, compare/contrast research findings, or apply a concept to a unique situation always tap a deeper level of understanding than those that simply ask students to repeat back definitions, lists, examples, or answers to highly similar questions.

Assessing Levels of Performance on Criteria

Regardless of what task you are asked to do (such as explain a theory, work a statistics problem, or provide an example), the same three basic, inter-related indicators of quality are applicable:

- “Appropriateness” – The extent to which the ideas or method are appropriate and relevant to the question
- “Correctness” – The extent to which the statements made or work shown is correct and accurate
- “Completeness” – The extent to which a complete or thorough answer is given

Put simply, a good answer clearly communicates a clear, insightful, and elegant answer to the question at hand. A concise, but thorough, statement is always the ticket to a good grade; an unnecessarily lengthy answer gives the reader the impression that you are not organized and that you do not fully grasp the topic. Similarly, instructors can only judge the quality of an answer by what is explicitly written, not by what the student “had in mind” when writing the answer; instructors simply cannot be expected to “search” for answers in disorganized or incomplete work.

In general, your level of performance in achieving these indicators of quality can be judged on the following general rubric. For each task involved in an answer, it is useful to rate performance on that task as being:

- Unacceptable – Performance does not meet the quality expectations for the task
- Problematic – Performance meets low quality expectations for the task
- Satisfactory – Performance meets normal quality expectations for the task
- Good – Performance meets high quality expectations for the task

Thus, there are different levels of appropriateness, correctness, and completeness for answers to any given task. This is simply another way of saying that different grades are possible for any task.

The Criteria as Applied to Specific Tasks

To be more concrete, the levels of performance ratings and the differing indicators of quality should be clarified for specific tasks. This section is designed to integrate the ideas above while tying them to the different tasks typically involved in an activity, problem, or question.

Using Main Theories and Concepts

In most cases I am interested, first and foremost, in your ability to identify and explain key concepts and theories. This is, of course, the traditional core aspect of many essay questions. Can you explain the relevant concepts at the appropriate depth in your answer?

Similarly, applying the key concepts is also the core aspect of most problem-based questions in mathematics and statistics. Can you implement the relevant concept and formulae to provide a correct answer?

Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Good
Theories & Concepts (0-3 Points)	Answer is irrelevant, incorrect, or missing for the question.	Answer is unreasonable with major flaws, such as barely relevant, misused, or vague concepts.	Answer is reasonable but with minor flaws, such as only broadly relevant, slightly incorrect, or only paraphrased concepts.	Answer is clearly relevant, with accurate and thorough explicitly-defined concepts.

Providing Evidence for and Applications of Concepts

Definitions of concepts by themselves do not clarify meaning; good examples are always more capable of clarifying the exact meaning or importance of a particular concept. Thus, in many situations, you should also be able to articulate how the main concepts can be applied to everyday life (i.e., personal or professional experiences, etc.). Can you explain how and why a main concept is important in a practical or everyday situation?

Similarly, as a science, psychology demands that we support our statements with research examples and findings (i.e., evidence based on empirical evidence). Research examples are data-based summaries of main concepts derived from the textbook, course readings, or class discussions. Can you provide strong research-based justification for the main concepts in your answer?

Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Good
Applications and Evidence (0-3 Points)	Evidence or example is irrelevant, incorrect, or missing for the question.	Evidence or example is unreasonable with major flaws, such as barely relevant, misused, or vague examples.	Evidence or example is reasonable but with minor flaws, such as only broadly relevant, slightly incorrect, or only paraphrased examples.	Evidence or example is clearly relevant, with accurate and thorough explicitly-described examples.

Interpreting and Integrating Concepts and Examples

Finally, an essay is more than a bulleted list or disorganized jumble of statements and claims. An essay should concisely integrate the concepts and examples to answer the question at hand. Can you organize your argument and justifications into a coherent and elegant written piece of work?

Problem-based questions also require similar interpretation. Can you organize your numerical answers in a manner that communicates and integrates what has been learned while solving the problem?

Category	Unacceptable	Satisfactory
Interpretation & Integration (0-1 Points)	Answer is in an improper format for the question, has several spelling and grammatical errors, and is not well organized.	Answer is in a proper format for the question, has few spelling and grammatical errors, and has a focused and integrated organization.

Combinations of Tasks for Course Assessments

Questions and problems may have different point values; this is because they ask for different things. Some are relatively simple whereas others are more complex. Therefore, some questions or problems require a combination of the tasks described above and are therefore graded appropriately.

Also note that many assignments, activities, or exams will contain several of the types of questions and problems described below. For example, a common activity in Social Psychology might be worth 6 points because it contains two distinct but related 3-point activities. The typical Statistics assignment might be worth 12 points because it contains two 4-point problem-based questions and one 4-point essay question. Or the typical essay portion of an exam in Psychology and Culture might be worth 20 points because it contains two 10-point essays. In short, all work will follow this rubric and the total number of points is determined by number of each type of question or problem contained therein.

Specific Criteria for 3-Point Activities

Activity-based questions are relatively simple tasks that are generally appropriate for activities. Their purpose is to provide you with an opportunity to practice identifying appropriate examples of a concept.

Specifically, I am interested in your ability to describe an appropriate, thoughtful, and sufficient example for the question at hand. In some cases, this involves describing an everyday application of a set of concepts; in others, this activity may involve describing research evidence of a concept. Because activity-based problems typically exist on pre-organized worksheets, formal writing style is not graded; however, some level of proper writing would be necessary for conceptual clarity.

Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Good
Applications or Evidence (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough

Specific Criteria for 4-Point Essays and Problems

Short essays and problems are more complex tasks that are generally appropriate for homework assignments and certain exams. Here the purpose is to assess your ability to implement or use a specific concept.

One example of the 4-point question is the short traditional essay, where I am specifically interested in your ability to reasonably articulate only the conceptual aspects of the question. Because it is an essay question, it will be expected to have a proper written form (i.e., sentence and paragraph structure, APA style, etc.).

Another version of the 4-point rubric is used for a typical story-based problem in Statistics, where I am specifically interested in your ability reasonably implement the relevant concept and formulae to communicate a correct answer. Here the calculation of a proper solution is analogous to properly describing a concept; the solution needs to be appropriate, accurate, and complete. And because I always ask for a short written interpretation of the solution, there is an expected proper written form as well (i.e., sentence structure, APA style for Results, etc.).

Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Good
Theories & Concepts (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough
Interpretation & Integration (0-1 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper Format for Question <input type="checkbox"/> Several Grammatical/Spelling Errors <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear or Haphazard Organization		<input type="checkbox"/> Proper Format for Question Few Grammatical/Spelling Errors Focused and Integrated Organization	

Specific Criteria for 10-Point Essay Questions

Finally, these relatively long essays are relatively complex tasks that are generally appropriate for exams. Here the purpose is to assess your ability to fully describe a concept, its application, and the evidence for its relevance.

Specifically, I am interested in your ability to not just reiterate key concepts and terms, but also to articulate how these concepts can be applied to everyday life and also how they can be justified with empirical findings. Because it is an essay question, it will be expected to have a proper written form (i.e., sentence and paragraph structure, etc.).

Category	Unacceptable	Problematic	Satisfactory	Good
Theories & Concepts (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough
Everyday Applications (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough
Research Evidence (0-3 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Vague <input type="checkbox"/> Major Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Lacking	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Implied <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Inaccuracies <input type="checkbox"/> Too Broad	<input type="checkbox"/> Relevancy Described No Inaccuracies Thorough
Interpretation & Integration (0-1 Points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Improper Format for Question <input type="checkbox"/> Several Grammatical/Spelling Errors <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear or Haphazard Organization		<input type="checkbox"/> Proper Format for Question Few Grammatical/Spelling Errors Focused and Integrated Organization	