

## GRADING

# Standards-Based Grading

FEBRUARY 15, 2010 Shawn

It dawned on my one day during my undergraduate work in physics that I was going to be a teacher. I knew that I wouldn't be able to tolerate the molasses-slow, competition-riddled life of a laboratory physicist. However, I loved something about science. I knew that I was frustrated with how my educational row had been hoed. I began thinking about how I would do it differently. How I would reach my students with compassion and ground-breaking pedagogy. How I would empathize, lift-up, and otherwise be as genuine as possible with young people.

Two years and a Master's degree later, I got my own classroom. I tried compassion, and was met with indifference by students. I tried ground-breaking pedagogy and was met with a lukewarm reception. I tried to empathize, lift-up, and being genuine, only to be really really tired on Friday.

I learned that my classroom atmosphere, and thought patterns of students weren't going to change unless some very fundamental things about school changed. I plan to write about these things in detail, but I want to address the most fundamental today:

## Grades

Grades are the reporting tool we use to communicate with students, parents, and other academic institutions about the quality of our products. So what would it mean if these were meaningless, inflated, or otherwise uncommunicative? Disaster, that's what. Short of being alarmist, I would argue that this is what we have going today. Our grades are **polluted**; an "A" will be given out just to say, "Aw, you showed up today." I've done it.

As I progressed through my first year of teaching, I began to work up to those things that I valued most. I began to become quite curt and frank with my students in order to blanch them into thinking a bit more. However, I needed to change something more fundamental, when along comes one of those conversations you see in movies. A pivotal moment where our hero learns something from a supporting character, and his motive is given new life.

## Standards-Based Grading

So simple was the change, yet so genuinely revolutionary it was for my classroom. The conversation goes like this,

M: "What do the grades in your gradebook mean to students and parents?"

S: "Not much I suppose, I mean the kids took the test, shouldn't they remember what was on it?"

M: "Maybe. But do they?"

S: "No."

M: "What if you put your content standards in the gradebook and graded proficiency with



## SHAWN CORNALLY

### Curriculum Vitae

Hello! I teach physics, calculus, object-oriented programming, and gastronomy at a rural Iowa high school. I also moonlight as a lecturer at the University of Iowa.

I love curing bacon, the Oxford comma, and getting students into the narrative arc of a lesson. I hate traditional grading, non-sparkling water, and being boring.

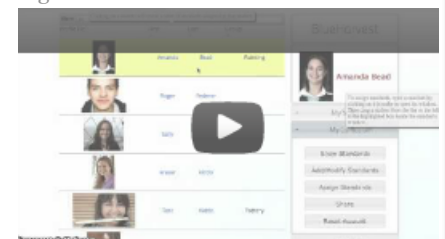
Yes, I want to be a part of your next project: shawn dot thinkthankthink at gmail dot com

I do NOT speak for the Solon Community School District (IA). They don't swear as much, not even close.

@ThinkThankThunk

## BLUEHARVEST

I built this so we can all grade nicely together:



www.BlueHarvestFeedback.com

specific ideas, rather than indexing by assessment tool?”

S: “Well, that would mean that students and parents would have a running record of their student’s understandings of the major topics in the course. They would know where they were proficient and lacking. I could use that information to edit my teaching, and they could use it to edit their studying.”

M: “Yup, ‘Quiz 3’ doesn’t mean much, but ‘Can Distribute Polynomial’ with a 1-10 by it sure does.”

S: “OMG. I think I need to go to the bathroom.”

That’s the idea in a nutshell. Why are you reporting cryptic titles like “Test 4” and “Unit Quiz 1.2?” Those tests and quizzes, or whatever assessment tools you use, are aimed at testing content standards, so stop destroying information by adding the scores, and just report proficiency by standard!

The thrill of having a high schooler walk in to your room and say the following should be enough to bring you into the fold:

“Mr. Cornally, I was looking at my grades, and I’m pretty sure I need to work on the quotient rule. Then, I think I should do a problem like the one of the quiz to show you I get it.”

So simple, so powerful. This student worked on the standard they needed to work on because it was the only 4/10 in their grade record. They now understand the quotient rule, even though it was assessed simultaneously with the product, power, and chain rule.

More to come on the logistics of running a standards-based gradebook. I promise to model how it would look in the majority of content areas. Think I will avert my gaze from you, English? Not hardly.

*standards based grading*

**Hello world!**

**Rabbits vs. Wolves**

Comments are disabled.

9 thoughts on “Standards-Based Grading”

**Anna Maria says:**

NOVEMBER 28, 2010 AT 4:27 PM

The funny thing is that I can’t even remember what quiz 3 was about!

**Pink Floyd and Pedagogy | Reflections of a Math Teacher Candidate says:**

NOVEMBER 19, 2010 AT 2:17 AM

[...] the song Another Brick in the Wall from Pink Floyd’s The Wall [...]

**David Falcone says:**

NOVEMBER 16, 2010 AT 8:16 AM

Two thoughts ... (1) this is an excellent idea and, yes, nothing revolutionary but

## BLOGROLL

[Action-Reaction](#)

[Always Formative](#)

[dy/dan](#)

[MeTA](#)

[Point of Inflection](#)

[Quantum of Progress](#)

[Research In Practice](#)

[TEACHING|Chemistry](#)

## MOST RECENT

[Like Moths to a Flame \(Help?\)](#)

[Inquiry Stylee: First Day of Physics Fall 2012](#)

[Standards-Based Grading: Every Thursday, A Love Note](#)

## RECENT DISCUSSION

[Shawn on Like Moths to a Flame \(Help?\)](#)

[Shawn on Like Moths to a Flame \(Help?\)](#)

[Julia on Like Moths to a Flame \(Help?\)](#)

[Evan on Like Moths to a Flame \(Help?\)](#)

[jsb16 on Like Moths to a Flame \(Help?\)](#)

## USAGE AGREEMENT

© 2012

I feel a little silly putting this here, but I’ve been asked about reproducing this blog’s material more than once, so here’s the copyright info: United States fair usage applies. An [email](#) would be nice for anything using more than a few paragraphs.

something revolutionizing, and (2) but this will only work (I think) in subject areas where there are clear and definable "standards". I teach statistics (no problem) and I teach Personality Theories (a problem ... unless I let the "standards" or measurement drive the course). Enough for now ...

thanks for what you offer here.

**Sarah says:**

SEPTEMBER 19, 2010 AT 1:44 AM

Shawn,

Do you have a suggestion for books or other media to read about SBG?

Thanks, sorry if you made a post about that already, I've read through your blog but didn't see one.

Thanks again!

**Shawn says:**

SEPTEMBER 19, 2010 AT 3:45 PM

@Sarah: Yup, anything my Marzano is worth reading. I'm not as specialized in assessment literature as my curriculum direct, so I'll just direct you towards him. Here's a link his blog: [MeTA](#). He's a fire hose of resources.

=shawn

**Why SBG? | Maryland Math Madness says:**

SEPTEMBER 16, 2010 AT 9:00 PM

[...] Grading (see dy/dan's "How Math Must Assess", Think Thank Thunk's SBG Manifesto & FAQ, and Parts I & II on this post from Take It to the Limit, among many others), I [...]

**Frank says:**

AUGUST 29, 2010 AT 6:19 PM

"I tried compassion, and was met with indifference by students. I tried ground-breaking pedagogy and was met with a lukewarm reception. I tried to empathize, lift-up, and being genuine, only to be really really tired on Friday."

Hahah that's the truth. Well I'm glad to know there are things that do work. After stumbling on this blog ring of "new school" STEM teachers, I can't \*not\* try SBG this year. I'll be trying that along with UbD.

**Rachael says:**

JUNE 18, 2010 AT 9:05 AM

Very excited about this... started thinking this way, but I'm not confident about putting it in practice, so I look forward to continue reading how you've worked it. (this is the first

- [Live Traffic Feed](#)



See your visitors in RealTime! Get the Free Live Traffic Feed [Get Feedjit Now!](#)

A visitor from Davenport, Iowa viewed "[ThinkThankThunk | Dealing with the fear of being a boring teacher.](#)" 23 secs ago

A visitor from Toronto, Ontario viewed "[The Standards-Based Gradebook – Beta | ThinkThankThunk](#)" 1 min ago

A visitor from Ferndale, Washington viewed "[Standards-Based Grading | ThinkThankThunk](#)" 2 mins ago

A visitor from Minneapolis, Minnesota viewed "[Standards-Based Grading | ThinkThankThunk](#)" 4 mins ago

A visitor from Minneapolis, Minnesota viewed "[Standards-Based Grading | ThinkThankThunk](#)" 25 mins ago

A visitor from Everett, Washington viewed "[I Want You \[Students\] To Spend Time Getting Better \(Standards-Based Grading\) | ThinkThankThunk](#)" 28 mins ago

A visitor from Hudsonville, Michigan viewed "[Standards-Based Grading | ThinkThankThunk](#)" 44 mins ago

A visitor from Winfield, Illinois viewed "[Standards-Based Grading](#)"

page I've read...)

## Sue VanHattum *says*:

FEBRUARY 28, 2010 AT 8:10 PM

Shawn, I'm wondering if you'd be interested in having some of this in my book, *Playing With Math*? I'm working with about 15 authors on it. It's mostly about stuff happening outside classrooms, but I'm including classroom material as well. My email is mathanthologyeditor on gmail. (I don't see a way to email you.)

| STANDARDS-BASED GRADING | CALCULUS: A COMEDY | PHYSICS | TOP 10 | MY TEDX VISION | THTHTH LABS

Powered by WORDPRESS . Designed by GETSTYLE.SE