

Tips for grading without utilizing attendance

Per University policy, grades should be based on assessments, assignments, lab reports, and/or participation. Student attendance should not impact student grade, except as it impacts the student's ability to complete other aspects of the grading structure.

Positive encouragement to attend class

Looking for wording to encourage students to attend class? Consider adding a statement such as this:

“Active and thoughtful participation is crucial to this course. Effective participation consists of reading any assigned readings prior to class and being prepared to discuss the material in class and to tie the reading and discussions to personal experiences. Student must be present to participate; therefore, absences will impede your ability to participate and thus have a negative impact on your achievement. If there are special circumstances causing absences, please contact me by phone or email. Students will be responsible for content covered in missed classes.”

Tips for promoting attendance

- Nothing prohibits faculty from taking attendance, even though they are not grading based on it. The mere fact of taking attendance is often a strong signal to students in and of itself of the importance of attending.
 - Encourage students to contact you if they are going to miss class. This is not intended as a punishment but rather to develop a culture in which students recognize their responsibility to attend class.
 - Create a classroom environment that provides added value to the work students do outside of class. Show that the classroom time is valuable and essential to meeting course learning objectives.
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Alternatives to grading attendance (or even participation)

Many ways exist to encourage attendance and participation without needing to grade on either one. Here are a few ideas:

- **Develop activities or problems that are completed in the classroom.** These activities can be graded, not graded, or simply marked as complete/incomplete. To reduce requests for excused absences, a grading structure that allows for drop lowest grade(s) can be established.
- **Use IF-AT cards to administer brief low stakes or no stakes quizzes.** These can be done individually or as a group. More information about IF-AT cards is available at

<http://www.epsteineducation.com/home/about/> or by contact CETL (cetl@uconn.edu). CETL maintains a supply of IF-AT cards for use in classes.

- **Administer formative assessments** such as minute papers, memory matrix, misconception/preconception checks, student generation of test questions, opinion polls, or muddiest point. More ideas are available at <http://s.uconn.edu/4g4>. These allow faculty to gain information about what the students do and do not understand. These can be graded as complete and incomplete.
- **Use iClickers or other technology to survey students.** Similar to other formative assessments these will assist in understanding what students understand.
- **Administer a quiz at the start of class** to assess pre-reading or understanding of previous content.

CETL staff is available to assist in identifying other approaches that work for your specific course or to teach you how to use technology to facilitate these approaches.

Beware of participation grades

When considering participation as part of the grade, instructors should consider some potential issues:

- How is participation actually being calculated? Some instructors record the frequency and quality of student comments utilizing a rubric but this can be challenging and hinder discussions. Without a rubric, participation grades are subjective. Subjective grading sets you up for grade challenges.
- Most students are uncomfortable speaking out in class, even when they are prepared for class. The use of participation grades can exacerbate the issue. Anxious or introverted students are even less likely to speak out than the average student. English as a second language students may not feel confident enough in their speaking abilities to speak out in class. Students who represent a minority view on the discussion topic or who have personal issues too closely related to the topic may prefer to not express their views. Studies show that girls and non-white students are less likely to speak up than boys or white students. To reduce the stress of participation in the classroom, faculty can provide other avenues for expressing opinions. When the topics for discussion are known in advance, the faculty member can allow students who are uncomfortable speaking in class to submit their viewpoints in writing prior to class.