

Teaching and Grading Writing

One of my English teachers explained to my class two systems for teaching and grading writing. The first system could have most of the class getting good scores on their first papers. Then the standards would keep getting raised through successive assignments, and the students would need to improve continually in order to maintain their good grades. My teacher called that system the “Alice in Wonderland method of grading” because “you have to keep running as fast as you can to stay in the same place.”

The other system is to have the same standards at the beginning as are required at the end. It’s a killer at the start of the year, but as students improve, so do their grades. Students can see and track their improvement.

I have always used the second system. And we celebrate together as the class average goes up.

Some of the students in the AGATE class will be thrilled with their grades on their first assignments, and some will be unhappy. There are a few things to keep in mind. It is, after all, the beginning of the year. We will be doing formal analysis with a serious introduction and conclusion and supporting evidence from the text.

Another thing to keep in mind is that, for one example, the work we do on our Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) represents a preliminary step toward the more rigorous and demanding research required for National History Day, something many of the students will do at middle school. I am working to prepare the students to do well on History Day projects.

The last thing you need to know is that a “bad” grade is not the end of the exercise. I often ask students who score below 80% to fix their papers and hand them in again *with the original graded papers attached*. I grade the fixed papers and average the two scores for the final grade.

Students who score 80% or above just need to use the corrections to help them do better next time.