

Ungrading Guidelines – ASTR 4201

The “[ungrading](#)” philosophy is that grades distract from the process of learning. While grades are intended to objectively evaluate students, objectivity is hard to achieve in practice. Generally, grades can act as a [carrot and stick](#) to provide motivation. However, as an advanced undergraduate (and special-topics graduate) course, I am assuming everyone in this class is here because they want to be. You are here because you want to learn and so the only motivation you need is a worthwhile educational experience.

For better or worse, a final grade will still need to be assigned in order to comply with the university’s practices (which are probably there to meet accreditation standards). So, I need to establish some sort of guidelines, so that your final assigned grade is not a mystery. Regular check-ins (see below) are also intended to prevent any grade surprises.

These are those guidelines:

A: Always well prepared for class. Has a strong grasp of course subject matter, as demonstrated by in-class discussions, as well as exam performance.

A-: N/A

B+: Generally prepared to discussed assigned problems in class. Demonstrates that pre-class reading and lecture-viewing assignments have been completed. Exam performance demonstrates a grasp of the subject matter and experience working through problems.

B: Performance between *B+* and *C+*

B-: N/A

C+: Sometimes prepared to discussed assigned problems in class. Demonstrates that many pre-class reading and lecture-viewing assignments have been completed. Exam performance demonstrates some idea of how to work through relevant problems.

C: Performance between *C+* and *D+*.

C-: N/A

D+: Infrequently prepared to discussed assigned problems in class, but was present. Infrequently demonstrated that pre-class reading and lecture-viewing assignments have been completed. Performance in exams demonstrates sparse knowledge of the subject matter fundamentals and inexperience working through relevant problems.

D: Performance between *D+* and *F*

D-: N/A

F: Almost never prepared to discussed assigned problems in class. Almost never demonstrated that pre-class reading and lecture-viewing assignments were completed.

In summary, this class is “B+ for effort”. If you are clearly putting in effort into the course, you will get a B+. If you are excelling, that will increase your grade. If you are not coming to class prepared, that will decrease your grade.

Check-ins

I realize that this grading style may be unfamiliar and, as such, has the potential to create more distracting stress than it is intended to avoid. So, we will have regular one-on-one quick check-ins to discuss your progress in the course. These are indicated on the course [schedule](#). We can of course discuss your course standing at any point throughout the semester, either in office hours or by-appointment.