

Grading Your Teen's Course Work

Dear Friends,

The 4th of July has come and gone, and we are heading into the lazy, hazy days of August. With the start of a new school year coming into view, you may be placing the last of your curriculum orders and clearing out clutter from the past school year. As you map out the course work that your teen will begin in September (or in August for you early birds who jump-start the year!), give some thought to how you will evaluate his or her academic abilities in each subject.

Methods of Evaluation

Determining your method of evaluation before the course begins helps you clarify your objectives. In addition to gaining knowledge in the subject, what skills would you like your teen to learn, and what are the main goals for the course? For example, in a high school English course, you may want your teen to improve his writing skills, learn new vocabulary words each week, brush up on using grammar properly, and read some novels you have chosen.

Once you've decided on the goals of the course, you'll be able to choose the types of assessments that will best measure your teen's knowledge and comprehension. Will it be tests and quizzes, or papers and presentations? Maybe oral discussions or hands-on projects will work better. On the other hand, you may mix it up and choose some from each of these areas, depending on your teen's learning style.

Then communicate to your teen what will be expected of her to do well in the course and how her efforts will be rewarded. If your teen knows that her discussion with you of yesterday's reading assignment will be scored on a scale of 1 to 10 and will factor into her final grade, this will likely spur her on to read diligently, take notes, and be adequately prepared for the discussion. Understanding what will be expected to write a paper to be presented to a small group at the end of the history unit may give her the impetus to delve into her studies with fresh enthusiasm.

Next, a grading scale needs to be chosen for assigning grades. Many teachers use a 10-point scale (90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C, and so on) while others use a 7-point scale (93-100 A, 85-92 B, 77-84 C, and so on.) You the parent will decide which scale you implement. We recommend using it consistently for your teen throughout the high school years. Some parents utilize straight letter grades (A, B, C, D, or F) while others choose to add +'s or -'s to the grades. Again, this is your decision.

Since elective courses don't always lend themselves easily to grading, some parents will resort to pass/fail in lieu of letter grades. However, pass/fail grades are not included [when calculating the grade point average](#), so we suggest using them sparingly, if at all.

Although every parent has the freedom to come up with a desired evaluative method, here are some additional thoughts to keep in mind:

- Decide on categories and assign a percentage of the final grade to each category you choose (for example: tests—50%, quizzes—30%, daily work—20%; or oral discussions—40%, papers—40%, projects—20%)
- Stay on top of correcting, grading, and giving your teen feedback at regular intervals.

Does this sound too complicated? Don't worry. We have some [grading examples](#) on our website to give you ideas and take the fear out of the whole process.

Regular Feedback

As your teen works through his course material, take time to regularly provide opportunities for him to demonstrate what he is learning. Your routine in a math course may be to assign practice problems daily. If so, be sure to have your teen or you check his answers. Feel comfortable in rewarding your teen for the time and effort he invests in completing the daily assignments.

Homework gives your teens practice, so we suggest that you evaluate it primarily for diligence and effort—not necessarily for how many problems they answer correctly the first time around. Including a certain percentage (20% perhaps) in the final grade for these assignments may act as an incentive to take them seriously. You are communicating to your teen that keeping up with math assignments is important and will not only pay dividends when he takes a math test, but will also make a positive contribution to his final grade in the course.

If you assign your teen a composition project, be sure to follow up and provide her with comments and suggestions for improving the paper. When assessing her papers, act as a coach by asking questions such as "How can you say this more clearly?" or "Can you illustrate this point with an example?" Let your teen see that your intent is to help her, not just to point out her mistakes. Encouragement goes a long way towards fueling a love for writing and will let your teens know you are noticing their improvement.

If you feel inadequate to evaluate your teen's compositions, consider enlisting the help of another homeschool parent, college student, neighbor, or friend who exhibits good writing skills to serve as a mentor for your teen. Patrick Henry College's [writing mentors](#) come alongside parents by reviewing the teen's compositions and making suggestions. You set the parameters and then communicate to the mentor your writing goals or objectives for your teen. The writing mentor takes it from there! Another alternative for help in this area may be a [pay by paper review service](#). Other sources for [evaluating your teen's compositions](#) can be found on HSLDA's Homeschooling Now blog.

Benefits to Grading

We mentioned above that one of the benefits of giving grades is to motivate teens to do their assignments and to learn the material. They will likely be graded in every season of their lives. College professors award grades; the military uses scores on tests for enlistment and advancement; employers sometimes use evaluations to let employees be aware of their performance or to award pay raises. So don't shy away

from giving grades even if it's difficult, especially when your teen's performance has been less than stellar. It may be the wake up call he needs to work a little harder next time.

Another purpose of grades can be to teach time management and adherence to deadlines. Once the deadline has passed, it is advisable to deduct points from your teen's grade for the assignment. No consequence for missing a deadline makes it meaningless. The real world runs on deadlines. (We know because we push the deadline each month when writing this newsletter!)

Although we understand and always appreciated the flexibility homeschooling gave us to move an assignment deadline, we want to encourage you to make it the exception, not the rule. Deadlines help to train your teens to set a good pace and not wait until the last minute to begin an assignment. They also help teens to divide a large assignment into manageable parts by setting incremental deadlines that serve as checkpoints for completion of the project or paper. You're training them for their future pursuits and to be honorable in keeping their appointments and commitments in a timely fashion.

[Making the Grade by Lesha Myer](#) can give you additional help, and HSLDA's website provides more details on grading guidelines.

Final Thought

We hear from a few parents who have an aversion to any type of grading. We would like to respectfully offer some comments for consideration.

Even if you did not evaluate and give your children grades during the elementary and junior high years, grades become more important during high school. One reason is that [high school transcripts](#) typically show final grades for each course a student completes during high school. If students have post-high school plans to further their education at a college, trade school, or technical school, in most cases these institutions are accustomed to seeing grades in order to ascertain how well your teen did in his course work.

Another reason for grades in high school is that colleges and scholarship sponsors tend to use the [grade point average](#) as a factor when making admission decisions and awarding scholarships. So, if you decide not to give your teen grades, be aware that it may cause some difficulty when applying to or enrolling in institutional schools.

Well ... how did we do? Did you find this newsletter helpful? (We couldn't resist asking for an evaluation and feedback!)

Join us next month as we share information on HSLDA's upcoming contests for your teens.

Enjoying the last days of summer,

Becky Cooke and Diane Kummer
HSLDA High School Consultants



Can You Look at the Clouds and Tell the Direction of the Wind?

An interesting phenomenon of wind is that it can blow in multiple directions at the same time, at different heights from the ground. But usually there is a prevailing wind. HSLDA watches the gusts and monitors the prevailing trends of change in the legal climate of home education. So no matter which way the wind is blowing, we're there to protect your family.

[More reasons to join HSLDA >>](#)