

# Getting Started with Grade Norming

Grading brings some of the greatest teaching challenges for instructors and TAs in large undergraduate courses: managing dozens or hundreds of assignments; providing students with meaningful feedback; ensuring fairness and consistency across graders and sections; and communicating effectively as a teaching team, all while juggling end-of-term deadlines. **Grade norming** is a strategy teaching teams can use to help accomplish all of these objectives, especially for major projects and written assignments. Here's one way to do it.

---

**Step 1: Plan ahead.** Once you have scheduled due dates for major assignments, plan a teaching team meeting with the instructor and all other graders shortly after these deadlines.

**Step 2: Use a rubric!** If you haven't yet created a rubric for the assignment, draft one before you meet. Analytic rubrics that describe specific grading criteria as well as examples of high, medium, and lower-scoring student work may be especially useful when working with multiple graders (see the template on the back of this handout). Not only does a detailed rubric help communicate grading criteria to students, it can help graders evaluate students' work more consistently and efficiently.

**Step 3: Road-test your rubric.** As a teaching team, choose three to five students' assignments to pilot-test your rubric. You might choose these at random, or you might try to choose examples that are likely to earn a range of different grades. Set a timer and have each grader use copies of the rubric to assign provisional scores to each assignment (this means each of the 3-5 assignments will have multiple provisional scores). Wait to compare your scores until all graders have finished scoring each of the selected assignments.

**Step 4: Debrief.** Before comparing scores, discuss the grading experience as a team. Are any parts of the rubric unclear? Are any of the criteria difficult to assess using the given descriptions? Do graders notice important components of the assignment that are *not* reflected in the rubric as written? (Note that where there is confusion among graders, there is likely to be confusion among students!)

**Step 5: Compare your scores.** Beginning with the first assignment, compare each grader's overall scores, as well as the sub-scores for each component of the rubric. Are your scores relatively similar or widely spread out? Where there are differences, have each grader discuss their reasoning. Do the same for each of the other assignments.

**Step 6: Get graders on the same page.** Decide as a team how you plan to address any questions or inconsistencies you identified in Steps 4 and 5. For example, you might choose to modify the rubric's descriptions of grading criteria for clarity or reallocate point values based on reading actual student work. You may not revise the rubric at all, but instead decide whether or how to address mechanical errors or other common mistakes in your scoring. If needed, test your revised rubrics by repeating Steps 3 through 6.

## Analytic Rubric Template

Grading Criteria	Excellent	Good	Needs Work	Points Given
<b>Thesis Statement</b>  <i>10 points</i>	<b>9-10 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>7-8 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-6 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Evidence &amp; Analysis</b>  <i>10 points</i>	<b>9-10 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>7-8 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-6 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Organization</b>  <i>10 points</i>	<b>9-10 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>7-8 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-6 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Grammar &amp; Mechanics</b>  <i>5 points</i>	<b>5 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>4 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-3 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Bibliography</b>  <i>5 points</i>	<b>5 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>4 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-3 points</b>  <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Comments:</b>  				<b>Total:</b>    <b>/40 pts</b>