

1. A Brief History of Grading:

In the first SBS in 1981 we had no book deadlines, and no grade sheet. We did give grades and verbal feedback. We soon found that this was not a great system. So we put together a grade sheet. LaPrelle Martin gave us very helpful suggestions. (More on grade sheets later).

2. Philosophy of Grading in SBS

Our goal is to give constructive and detailed feedback on the student's work especially in their use of the Inductive Method and in their understanding of the content of the Bible Book.

3. Why Grade?

Evaluation is part of the learning process. Growth is the product of evaluation and feedback. The feedback the student receives in SBS is not just a grade slapped on a piece of paper. In SBS the feedback in grading is detailed and constructive (helpful). It is also written as well as verbal. Grading is a place to celebrate growth. It is a format to celebrate a job well done. It is one platform that we have to encourage and challenge the students.

There is no value in not grading. Staff need to know how the students are doing. This reflects on our skills as teachers. Likewise Students themselves need to know how they are doing in the school. Evaluation is not unloving. Students have come to learn, so evaluation is necessary.

What about students who do not want to know their grade? It is suggested that the staff work through the issues and reasons why a student does not want to know their grade. Is it fear, identity issues, competition? Evaluation is a part of life so it is best to help the student mature in this area rather than avoiding it.

4. Grading (our evaluation) should be a learning experience for the student.

a. The Rough Horizontal: The Rough Horizontal is a check point for the students. By checking the rough horizontal we are letting the student know that they have this portion of the assignment approved before they move on in the assignment. This shows that we care for the student and want them to succeed. It also gives the student confidence and security to move forward in the assignment.

The Rough Horizontal: The checking of the rough Horizontal is also a contact point with the student to see how they are doing not just in the assignment but in general. This can be a time for pastoral care. It can also be a time to dialogue about what the student is learning.

Checking the Rough Horizontal: It takes time to check a rough horizontal. It takes time to think through the student's work. Give yourself time to do this carefully. Maybe tell

the student to come back in 15 minutes so you have time do this step and gather your thoughts. Don't make the student have your exact horizontal. Let them be inductive.

b. Contact points: Make it a habit to check on the students as they progress through the assignment. This is helpful for verbal processors. Create times to talk. One year we had a staff member who had an after dinner coffee time in his dorm room for students. Host monthly discussion times with the staff and students to further discuss the books they have completed.

c. Grading the completed Assignment: The completed assignment reflects the student's learning. The student learns when they are given good feedback. They will need to know where they did well and how they improved. They need to be shown how they could improve. By shown, this means actually show by charting. Give the student a visual example. They need to be helped if they missed something huge.

The student learns when the staff makes the feedback on their work an event. Don't just hand back the assignment with a grade sheet. Go over the work with them and discuss the feedback. Do they understand the comments that were made? Discuss how the book impacted you and how it impacted the student. Discuss areas where you both want to do more study. Discuss the application. The application is very revealing and this is a time to pray with the student or just hear their heart.

d. What is not helpful: It is not helpful to say to your best (excellent) students, "You could have done more." This just keeps raising the bar. It communicates that the student is good but never good enough. This only frustrates the student. If their work is excellent then say so but challenge them by spending time talking about their work. What did they find difficult, or exciting? What do they want to think about more in future study?

5. The Grade Sheet:

a. The Points on the grade sheet should reflect the time spent on that part of the assignment. If the student spent a significant amount of time then the grade sheet should reflect this with a substantial amount of points. More points should also be given if this is a portion of the assignment that is something deemed more important or valuable. People value what they spend time on so the grade sheet should reflect this. There should be a certain percentage for the Horizontal, a certain percentage for verticals and a certain percentage for application and the Basic Required Information. Some schools also give points for doing the five readings.

b. Some schools have very detailed grade sheets. Some schools have less detailed grade sheets. The detailed grade sheets are put together with the motive to be fair and not subjective. Most grade sheets that were extremely detailed have now gone back to a more general grade sheet. (More on this later.)

c. If a student is asked to do something as part of the assignment then whatever is asked of the student should be on the grade sheet and it should be assigned a certain amount of points. Color coding the Bible was not originally a part of the SBS program. In the beginning Color coding went on charts. Now various schools require color coding but it is not graded and it is not a part of the grade sheet, yet for some schools if this is not done then points are taken off. If color coding is required then it must be looked at by the staff and graded and given it a certain amount of points probably under Observation. However observation should still be required on Vertical charts.

d. The Goal is not to make grading easy for the staff person. The goal is to foster discovery, thinking, exploration and thoughtful conclusions. If a staff person can give a grade without really looking over the student's work then the purpose of SBS is not being met. If grading becomes just looking at what the student did not do and taking off points then we have made grading mechanical and we are not looking at what the student did do.

6. The Final Grade for the Quarter

a. The students should be told verbally and in written form what makes up their final grade for the quarter. Charts and tests are a part of the final grade for most schools. Tests are usually not more than a third of the grade. Some schools also count participation. Whatever it is it must be communicated in the beginning of the quarter.

b. Big books count more: Larger Books count more than smaller books and this should be communicated in the beginning of the quarter. For example in the overall grade Genesis counts 5 times as much as Jude. If a student does not do a big book it really affects the quarter grade. (see handout for point for books)

7. Letter or Numerical Grade?

The University of the Nations records requires a letter grade. The U of N Catalogue gives the breakdown for each letter grade. So if the student is given a numerical grade then they need to know that the U of N will just record it as a letter grade. So even though they may have a 98 average the U of N will just record their grade as an A. Some schools give a numerical grade on the grade sheets but just record it as a letter grade. This helps the student know more precisely how they are doing but it eliminates discussion over a few points since the grade is recorded as A, B, C or D.

8. No Sliding Scale

An A is an A for any student. A student gets a grade by earning it in the work they do. Grades are not bestowed on students. Again Grades are earned.

9. Criticisms of SBS Grading

a. The grading in SBS is subjective. To some degree this is true and in other ways it is an unfounded criticism. It is true in that humans are grading the student's

assignments and as humans we make value judgments. This is good. Robots and computers are not grading the work but living humans with various strengths and weaknesses.

b. The criticism is unfounded because each staff person works within the confines of a grade sheet. The expectations are clear and the points are clearly communicated. Every SBS has a grade sheet so there is not a huge variation in the grading.

10. Avoiding Criticisms and Complaints.

(This section is adapted from an outside source; Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching, Grading Student work.)

a. Clearly state, verbally and in written form, at the beginning of the quarter the criteria for the final grade.

b. Clearly explain, verbally and in written form, at the beginning of the quarter, the grade sheet.

c. Clearly explain, verbally and in written form, at the beginning of the quarter, the weight given to each book

d. State verbally and in written form your policy on late assignments. This should be on the grade sheet.

e. Do not modify grading policies mid course. Be consistent.

f. Keep accurate records. Record all grades immediately. Put this information in a place that is easy for the staff to access.

Some additional Thoughts for SBS Staff:

1. Return graded assignments promptly. Students have assignment deadlines so staff should have grading deadlines. It is not honoring or helpful to the student to not grade their work promptly. This small detail speaks loudly to the student.

2. Staff often ask how long it should take to grade a set of charts. That varies with each staff person. The key is how well the staff person knows the book they are grading. There are a few things a staff person can do to help in the grading process. Be in class and be engaged. Being in class helps you review the book so grading is easier. Review your charts and horizontal so you are familiar with the book. Read the book before you grade the charts.

3. Read all of the Student's work. No skipping, skimming or just giving a grade based a general opinion of the student's work. They wrote every word so read it all.

4. When to grade? Each staff person should make a schedule so that books are graded promptly. Some staff grade one student's work each day. Some grade everyone work at one time. Figure out what part of the day is best for study and which is for grading.

5. School leaders (Session leaders), everyone on staff should be grading. If the school leader is not grading then it gives the impression that grading is work that leaders are not required to do. It is insignificant and for the lowly. If a leader is too busy to grade then they should delegate less important matters to staff. The school leader needs to know how the staff are going with the grading process. As well the school leaders need to grade so that they know what kind of work the students are doing.

6. Have a positive attitude toward grading. Do not talk negatively about grading. This is a student's life. It represents hours of work. It is valuable.

7. All student comparing is not bad. A student discussing or comparing something can be an avenue for learning. There is nothing wrong with a student (after their rough horizontals have been approved) talking to another student about their approved rough horizontal. This is a way to learn. A student with a C grade could learn something by looking at an A student's work. If they looked at a graded set of charts it might help them to improve.

A final Word

A student's work, especially their work in the Scriptures, is something sacred. It represents their time (and lots of it) with God in His Word. We are treading on Holy Ground when we grade someone's work in the Scriptures. Grading is a serious responsibility. It is a privilege to see into the heart and mind of a student.

This handout was put together by:

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