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## A Rubric for Evaluating Student Blogs

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By [Mark Sample](#)



The pedagogical value and the challenges of integrating student blogging into your teaching is a recurring topic on ProfHacker. Some of our [earliest posts](#) dealt with student blogging, and we have [revisited the issue](#) frequently. Most recently, Jeff and Julie wrote about that age-old question—*How are you going to grade this?*—when it comes to [evaluating classroom blogs](#). Jeff and Julie offer a number of fantastic pointers, and they also refer to **a blogging rubric** that I use in my own teaching. I've never directly described how I grade student blog posts on ProfHacker, but I think it's about time to share what has been a valuable tool, and to encourage professors to adopt and modify it to fit their own needs.

I typically require weekly blog posts from my students, and though each post by itself may not amount to much, they cumulatively account for a substantial portion of a student's final grade. For example, in a recent [graduate class on postmodernism](#), I required once-a-week postings that added up to 20 percent of the final grade:

*Each student will contribute to the weekly class blog, posting an approximately 500-word response to the week's readings. There are a number of ways to approach these open-ended posts: consider the reading in relation to its historical or theoretical context; write about an aspect of the day's reading that you don't understand, or something that jars you; formulate an insightful question or two about the reading and then attempt to answer your own questions; or respond to another student's post, building upon it, disagreeing with it, or re-thinking it. In any case, strive for thoughtfulness and nuance. To ensure that everyone has a chance to read the blog before class, post your response by midnight the evening before class.*

Because these posts are online well before class meets, I am able to skim them for recurring themes or concerns, which I often use as beginning points for class discussion. In this way, the blogs have been invaluable in preparing me to meet my students **at the outer edges of their understanding** of the material.

But when you have 15 or 25 posts per week, per class, how do you grade them all? *How do you let students know what kind of work you value?—And what kind of work they should likewise value?* Assessing the enormous number of posts on the class blog is challenging, to say the least. In my efforts to quickly and fairly evaluate blog posts, I developed a simple 5-point scale, which rates each post according to the level of critical thinking and engagement displayed in the post. The rubric is quick and easy and in roughly 1–2 minutes I know what to rate any given blog post:

### Rating Characteristics

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 4 | <i>Exceptional.</i> The blog post is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. The post demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. The entry reflects in-depth engagement with the topic. |
| 3 | <i>Satisfactory.</i> The blog post is reasonably focused, and explanations or analysis are mostly based on examples or other evidence. Fewer connections are made between  |

- ideas, and though new insights are offered, they are not fully developed. The post reflects moderate engagement with the topic.
- 2 *Underdeveloped.* The blog post is mostly description or summary, without consideration of alternative perspectives, and few connections are made between ideas. The post reflects passing engagement with the topic.
- 1 *Limited.* The blog post is unfocused, or simply rehashes previous comments, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.
- 0 *No Credit.* The blog post is missing or consists of one or two disconnected sentences.

I strive for as much transparency as possible, so it's essential that my expectations (i.e. the rubric) are explained to the students early on, and always available for them to review later. I also let the students know what their grades are for each post, using my university's officially sanctioned method of transmitting student grades (that is, Blackboard).

Grades are of course a superficial way of showing students what we value. Direct and immediate descriptive feedback does more than a single letter or number can. So in order to deepen students' understanding of their own work, I comment on every student's blogging at least twice throughout the semester. These are public comments, posted below each student's blog post, again contributing to the collaborative and transparent ecosystem of the blog.

**How about you?** If you ask students to blog, **how do you evaluate their efforts?** Do you have **a rubric to share** or **other tips** for our readers?

*[I tend to scribble a lot photograph courtesy of Flickr user Nic McPhee / Creative Commons Licensed]*

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