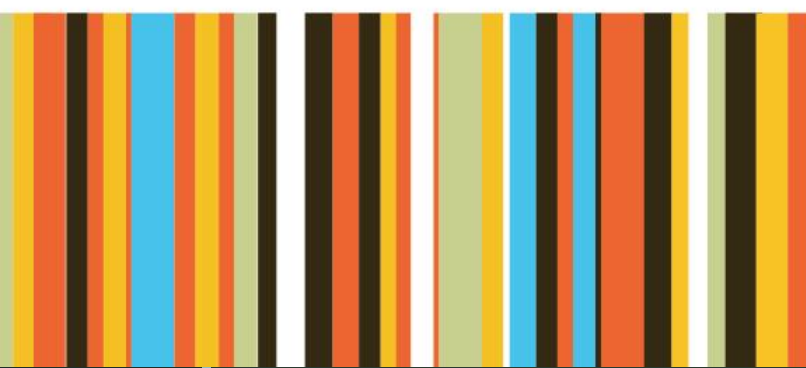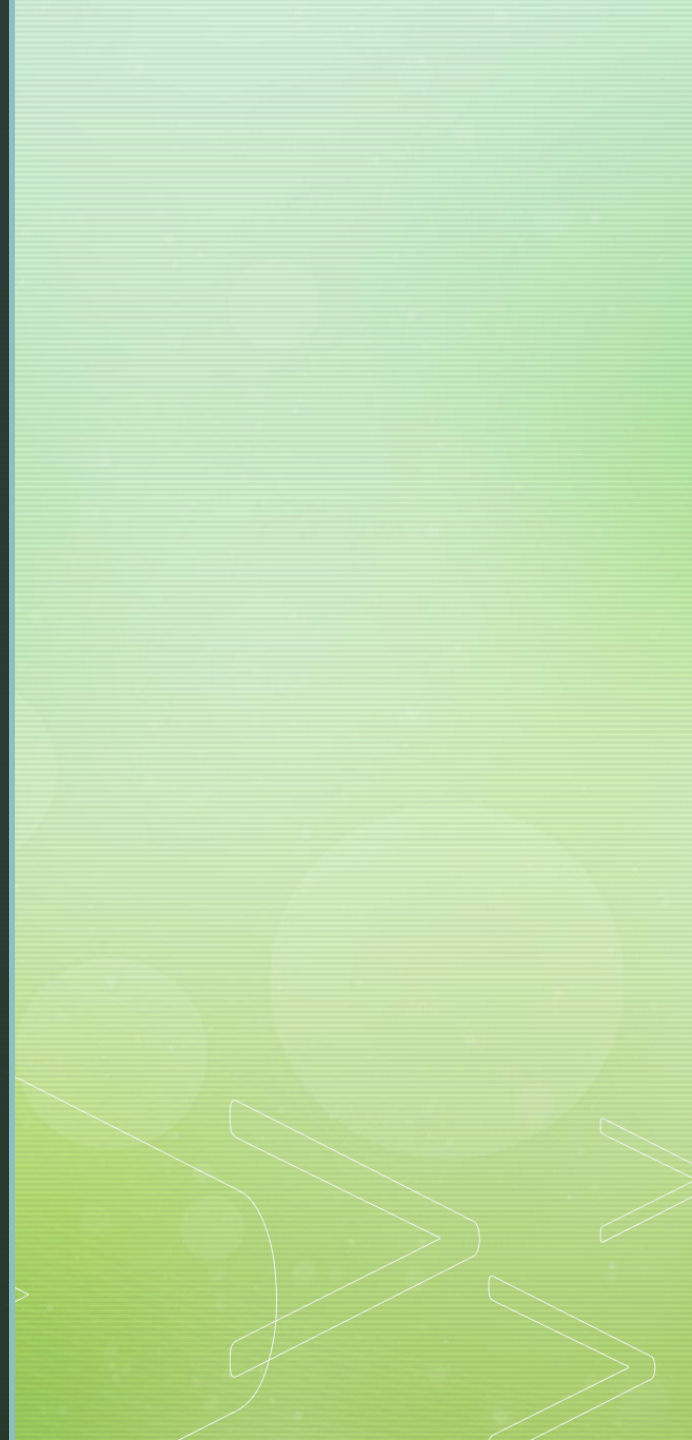NATASHA HAUGNES,
HOAG HOLMGREN, AND
MARTIN SPRINGBORG

MEANINGFUL
GRADING

A GUIDE FOR
FACULTY IN THE ARTS

What, Why & How:

Alternative Grading Approaches

Learning Outcomes

- Increased self-awareness about grading.

- 1-2 concrete ideas about implementing alternative grading.

What enables this learning? Curiosity, intent, listening to others' perspectives and ideas.

Reflective Questions

- Why do we grade?

- What experiences have you had with being graded?

- When does grading work well? What does it accomplish or communicate?

- When does grading harm or impede teaching and learning?

Share at will: any big frustrations, questions or discoveries?

3 minutes to reflect and write!

Concerns about grading

Grading stifles creativity

Students worry more about the grade than the learning

Artistic work cannot be judged; process cannot be assessed

ALSO

Grading perpetuates inequality

How can we cultivate creativity, learning, individual voice, and equity in our grading?

Three alternative approaches to grading

Labor-based grading

- Grade is based on labor
- Quality of the product is discussed, but not related to the grade

Specifications Grading

- Uses categories of pass/not pass (or not pass <u>yet</u>)
- NO partial credit

Ungrading

- Actually *is* grading
- Based in student self-reflection with instructor responses

Labor-Based Grading

- Championed by Asao B. Inoue, who developed this approach in response to frustration with grades based on the quality of work.

- "*One way to understand this focus on labor and effort is to consider what this course really is about. This is a **writing course**, not a **paper course**. Writing is a verb, a practice. It is labor. A paper is at least one step removed from that labor and learning. It is a product of your labor, not your labor itself. So our grading system should align with what this course is mostly about, which is your acts of learning, your labors of writing.*" (Inoue)

Labor-Based Grading

- Faculty provide general guidelines for assignments in order to count as complete labor. For example:

  - How much time students spend on a task

  - How many words or pieces the student produces (e.g., "Includes 300 words of understandable language," "Includes 5 preliminary sketches")

  - Whether or not the student followed the labor instructions (e.g., "Explore a concept from this unit," "Explore differences in line weights in an observational drawing")

Labor-Based Grading

This may start with a conversation and negotiation of answers to the following questions:

- "How much access to time each week do we feel is appropriate for this course, given what we hope to accomplish and what is expected of each of us?

- How much labor each week will constitute A, B, or C progress?

- How will you know when you have completed the labor of an assignment adequately?

- How will the teacher know that you've followed the labor instructions for any reading or writing assignment?

- What are the markers of your labor that can be used both for our contract purposes and for your own reflection purposes?"

http://asaobinoue.blogspot.com/2021/06/what-is-labor-based-grading-system-and.html

Labor-Based Grading

		(Describe your work in this session'	(which kind of session		(Where did	engagement ratings:	
(mins)	(format: 9/18)	ex: "wk 1a labor, wrote narrative")	is it? Mark "R" or "W")	(start time; ex: 3pm)	you work?	1	very low
						2	low
						3	neutral
						4	high
						5	very high

Labor Log (version 13)
Please log every session of labor for our class in a separate row.

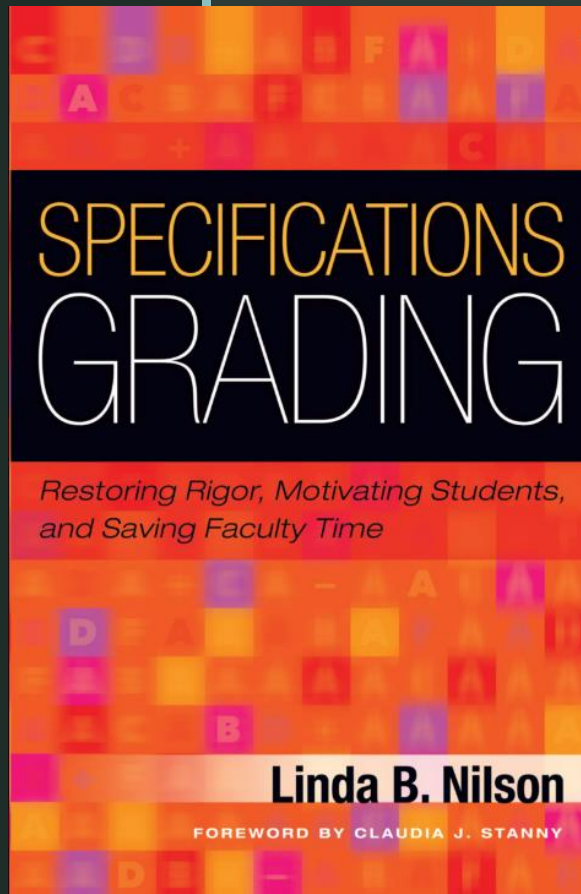| duration	date	session	reading or writing?	start time	location	engagment	mood
180	3/19/2018	writing course syllabus and materials	Writing	12:00 PM	home office	3	tired
180	3/20/2018	writing course syllabus and materials	Writing	9:00 AM	home office	4	neutral
390	3/21/2018	writing course syllabus and materials	Writing	8:00 AM	home office	5	happy
180	3/24/2018	wk 1 class prep	Writing	10:30 AM	home office	3	content
240	3/24/2018	reading Arao & Clemens and Barthes	Reading	1:00 PM	home office	4	happy
60	3/25/2018	reading Barthes and finishing wk 1 class prep	Reading	10:00 AM	home office	5	content
60	3/25/2018	finishing wk 1 class prep	Writing	11:00 AM	home office	5	interested
60	3/29/2018	prep wk 2 presentations and labor instructions	Writing	2:00 PM	home office	3	tired
45	3/29/2018	reading Ono article	Reading	3:00 PM	bedroom	4	anxious
60	3/31/2018	reading Graff article	Reading	2:00 PM	home office	5	relaxed

Breakdown of the Main Components

Below is a table that shows the main components that affect your successful compliance with our contract. These are the ONLY grades you may receive in this course (there are no in-between grades, like a C+ or a B-).

	# non-Partic Days	# of Late Assigns.	# of Missed Assigns.	# of Ignored Assigns.
A+ (4.33)	2	3	1	0
A (4.0)	2	3	1	0
B (3.0)	2	3	1	0
C (2.0)	3	4	2	0
D (1.0)	4	5	3	1
E (0.0)	5	6	4	2

Specifications Grading

- Championed by Linda B. Nilson in response to frustration with letting students get partial credit on assignments that include crucial skills or knowledge.

- Uses Pass/Not Pass (yet)

- Allows for multiple attempts to demonstrate mastery of learning outcomes

- Optional: Students can choose the level of work equal to a grade

TO EARN	DO ALL THE FOLLOWING
A	• Attend 26 classes • Submit 60 in-class activities on time • Exam average score ≥ 80% * • Earn **Pass** for 15 written assignments • Earn **Pass** for individual project • Earn **Pass** for 7 labs • Earn **Pass** for group project • Be present on group project presentation days
B	• Attend 22 classes • Submit 50 in-class activities on time • Exam average score ≥ 70% * • Earn **Pass** for 12 written assignments • Earn **Pass** for 6 labs • Earn **Pass** for group project • Be present on group project presentation days

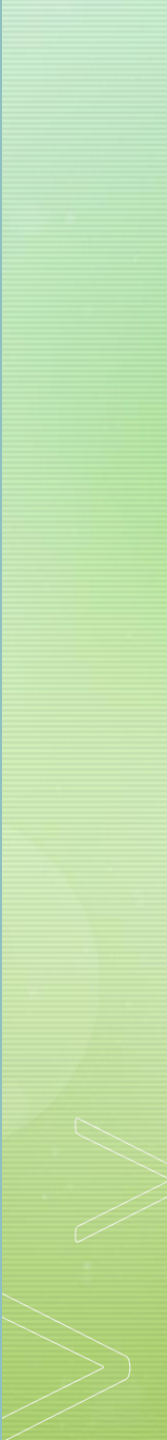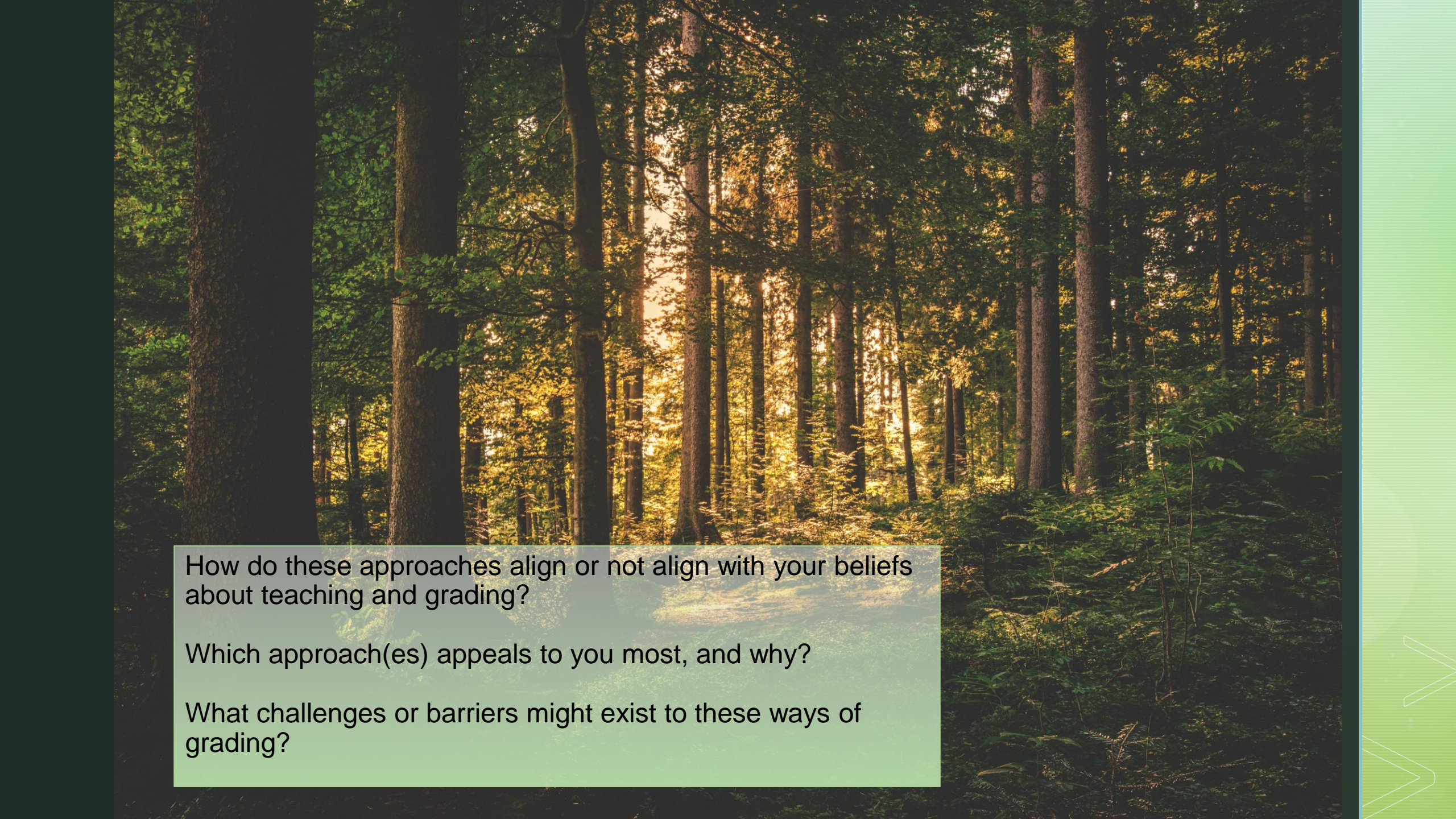| Glazing	Surface	Size	Preliminary sketches
Glazing is even with no thin, thick, or missing spots.	Surface is smooth; free of bumps and no ragged edges.	Piece is at least 8 inches tall.	Student submits 5-10 preliminary sketches of piece.
		Pass	Pass
Not pass yet	Not pass yet		
No blank spots were seen, however, the glaze was too thick, resulting in melted areas.	The trimming of the piece was done well, but sanding should be done to get a smoother surface.	Piece was 9.5 inches tall.	Student submitted 2 large pages including several small sketches.

Why use specifications grading?

- It focuses in on the key learning outcomes; students cannot pass the class without demonstrating achievement of these outcomes.

- It clearly outlines what students need to do to earn certain grades. If they simply want to pass a course, they can invest that level of effort.

- It increases quality feedback and engagement with feedback.

Ungrading

- Championed by Jesse Stommel who was frustrated by the lack of dialogue about learning and lack of consideration of process in grading.

- The student determines their grade based on self-reflection and analysis of the learning process. Faculty determine their level of agreement and the final grade.

- In practice, there is usually little discrepancy between grades, and faculty occasionally have to raise the grades.

How do these approaches align or not align with your beliefs about teaching and grading?

Which approach(es) appeals to you most, and why?

What challenges or barriers might exist to these ways of grading?

Tips and thoughts

- Do not feel like you have to account for the moments of brilliance in your grading scale.

- To better understand what you see as passing work, take work from previous classes and put into 3 piles: no pass, pass, high pass. By describing each pile, you will outline basic expectations for the course or assignment.

- Students are often used to traditional grading schemes. If you implement alternative practices, clearly explain how and why you are using these practices. Provide early grading examples to build trust.