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BY Cathy Vatterott

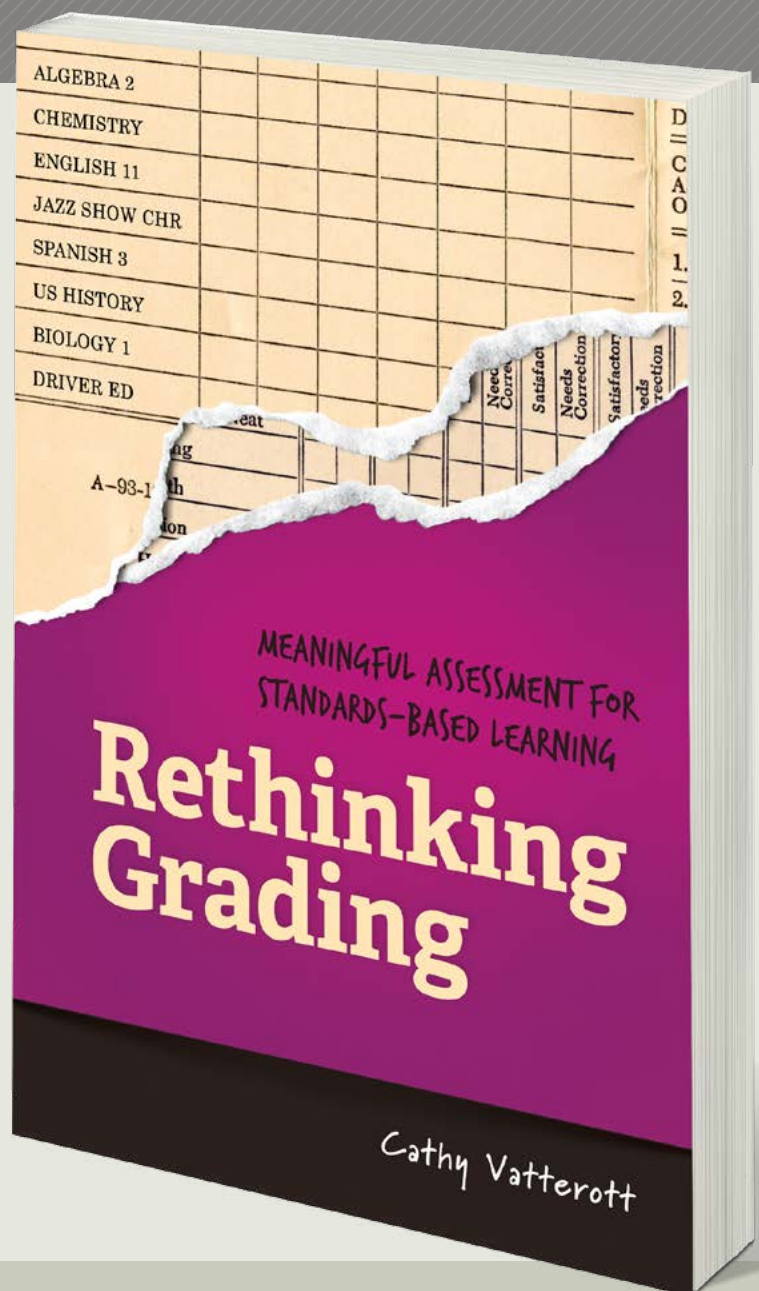
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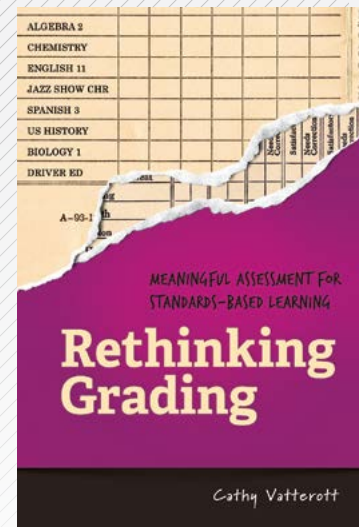
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Rethinking Grading: Meaningful Assessment for Standards-Based Learning

by *Cathy Vatterott*

GRADING SYSTEMS OFTEN REWARD ON-TIME TASK COMPLETION AND PENALIZE DISORGANIZATION AND BAD BEHAVIOR. Despite our best intentions, grades seem to reflect student compliance more than student learning and engagement. In the process, we inadvertently subvert the learning process.

After careful research and years of experience with grading as a teacher and a parent, Cathy Vatterott examines and debunks traditional practices and policies of grading in K-12 schools. She offers a new paradigm for standards-based grading that focuses on student mastery of content and gives concrete examples from elementary, middle, and high schools. *Rethinking Grading* will show all educators how standards-based grading can authentically reflect student progress and learning—and significantly improve both teaching and learning.



Author

CATHY VATTEROTT is an education professor and researcher at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, a former middle school teacher and principal, and the parent of a college graduate. She has learned from her workshops that “grading continues to be the most contentious part . . . conjuring up the most intense emotions and heated disagreements.”

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Rethinking Grading

MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT FOR
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Introduction

Grading. It's the hardest decision I must make in teaching. Every semester I agonize about what is right. Is the grade truly indicative of the student's performance? Do I have the weighting right? Have I given students enough opportunities to improve? All this happens within the confines of the amount of time and energy I have available to determine grades.

I continue to evolve in my practice. Last semester I created structured formative activities and rubrics. I found that those strategies helped more students "hit the mark" the first time. I had fewer rewrites with fewer deficiencies.

Writing this book has been an awakening. Each semester I am more thoughtful, more analytical, and more reflective about my own grading practices. At the same time, I am troubled by the mindset that my college freshmen and sophomores bring to my courses. (The juniors and seniors are a bit better.) For many, their K-12 experience has left them woefully unprepared to handle college-level work. They often don't fully comprehend how to analyze and synthesize. They seem to be stuck in the mode of "just tell me what you want." Many of them are terrible writers, unable to express their thoughts clearly and intelligently. I see firsthand the damage we have done, and how we have handicapped them

for college by giving grades that don't reflect learning. I am not surprised by how many drop out.

We have the opportunity to change that. We have the opportunity to send students forward to college with the conceptual knowledge and learning strategies that are so critical to college success. It starts with empowering them to take charge of their own learning and by eliminating some of the obstacles of traditional grading. Standards-based grading has the potential to restore integrity to the grading process. It can and will change our students' futures.



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