

art-laden processes to help students come to know material, but we rarely mandate that all students use art skills to demonstrate mastery.

Does this mean we don't grade our students' political cartoons? No. It means we teach them all cartooning skills to improve their competence, and we complement their demonstrations of proficiency with other assessments, such as written analyses and quizzes, and what they contribute orally.

6. Avoid allowing extra credit and bonus points.

"Mr. Terwilliger," David asked. "I didn't do so well on that written, political cartoon analysis. I need to do something to raise my grade. Could I do a poster or something on cartooning for extra credit?"

"Sorry, David," Mr. Terwilliger replies. "I'm not a fan of allowing students to do extra credit to boost their grades. You can't substitute posters and other things for most assignments because I give assignments with a specific purpose in mind. In this case, how does doing a poster on cartooning teach you to analyze political cartoons in writing, or prove that you can?"

David looks down, his face crumbling in early panic. "It doesn't," he laments.

"I tell you what," his teacher continues. "You can go back and redo the written analysis until you meet the high standard of excellence set for it. What do you say?"

David looks up, not appeased, but not completely lost. "I don't think I can do any better. I worked on that for a long time, and all I got was a D+. I don't know how to do it differently."

"Well, look at it as your first attempt. You have more feedback now. Let's take a look at what still needs improvement. I'll work with you as you rewrite. You'll get it."

David thought for a moment before speaking. "Okay, but I don't know how I'm going to do this and keep up with my regular work. I have a baseball tournament every night this week."

Mr. Terwilliger nodded. "It's not insurmountable. Let's see what we can work out."

Many teachers offer extra credit as a way for students to improve a low grade. They think it gives students hope, and if the student is willing to take the initiative to do something a little extra, he should be rewarded by the addition of more points or a raised grade.

Some teachers also offer extra credit as incentive to students to stretch themselves, pushing beyond the regular unit of study. They might announce to a class, "Anyone who wants to earn an extra twenty-five points can do so by analyzing the current political climate for environmental protection programs and compare it with the political climate for such programs in the mid-

1970s. What's changed, how are we affected today, and what is the likely climate for environmental protection programs twenty years from now?"

These seem relatively safe and routine strategies, but we need to be very careful with extra credit offers. Anything that has enough points attached to it to alter a grade's accuracy in terms of what students have mastered should be avoided. For example, if a student demonstrates a C level of mastery, he or she shouldn't be given an opportunity to artificially inflate that grade with other work that doesn't hold him or her accountable for the same benchmarks or learning outcomes as the original assignment. Substituting a poster for an essay, for example, wouldn't cut it if teaching essay writing. Life science teacher Shah says it well: "How can you do the extra when you haven't done the regular?"

On the other hand, if the teacher is simply looking for a way for a student to express what she knows about pinocytosis, it doesn't matter what test format is used. In another example—conducting a real interview with an adult expert in the field of study, the student would not adequately apply the same skills and content by summarizing an interview news show, mentoring others in interviewing techniques, or creating a library display or PowerPoint presentation on interviewing skills. If we're assessing interview skills, she conducts an interview, and with the student, we analyze it and eventually evaluate her proficiency with interviewing others.

Though we might consider alternative routes to demonstrate mastery as we first design our unit, the choices for the final offering are made after serious contemplation. There is a purpose to each one. If a student can muster an alternative assignment that accounts for everything we are seeking, we can give that alternative serious consideration.

Bonus points on tests call for the same caution. If the student falters in his or her demonstration of mastery with the regular test items, but overcomes those scoring losses with points from a bonus section, then we have to reconsider whether the new, bonus-inflated grade really represents what the student knows and is able to do. This is especially a concern if the bonus questions or prompts are unrelated to the test's topic, such as the spurious bonus questions used by some teachers: "What's Mr. Terwilliger's favorite sport?" or "What famous person died on this day in 1989?" or "What was the score of last night's Orioles game?" or "Who's buried in Grant's tomb?"

If the bonus problems allow students to demonstrate the content and skill proficiencies required in the regular test items, then it's probably okay to use the bonus-inflated grade, but it begs two questions: If the bonus questions require the same skills and content as the regular items, then why are they not a part of the main body of the test? And, if the student can respond to the bonus questions that require the same skills and content proficiency as the regular test items, why couldn't he or she do the regular ones to show proficiency?