Chapter 7. Designing a More Equitable Scorecard: Grading Contracts and Online Writing Instruction

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Abstract: In this chapter we consider how applying Borgman and McArdle's (2019) recommendations for being a responsive and strategic online instructor to labor-based grading contracts in online writing instruction (OWI) can help us develop a strategy for response aimed at making our courses more equitable for all students. Labor-based contract grading, which makes student labor in the course the basis for assessment, has been identified as a more equitable method of assessment for diverse learners, and this method of assessment also works against the assumption that some students bring to their online courses that they are "correspondence like" (Borgman & McArdle, 2019, p. 30). For these reasons, labor-based contract grading can be an appealing response strategy to use in OWI. Nevertheless, this strategy can be difficult to implement effectively in OWI due to students' unfamiliarity with contract grading and the constraints imposed by learning management system (LMS) technologies. These challenges can lead to user experience problems for students and instructors that leave students confused about course grades and instructors discouraged from using grading contracts. We contend that a student-centered design approach is necessary to use grading contracts as an effective response strategy in OWI, and we share the grading contract documents we use in our own online classes and discuss how these are designed around students and their needs.

Keywords: labor-based contract grading; response strategy; assessment; student-centered design

In this chapter, we consider two elements of Borgman and McArdle's PARS approach, responsive and strategic. We show how using these two elements along with labor-based grading contracts can make our online courses more equitable for all students. We think of our efforts to implement labor-based grading contracts in online writing instruction (OWI) as an attempt to design a more equitable "scorecard" with which to assess our students. In golf, scorecards are used to record how many shots a golfer took to complete the hole, and at the end of the round, the scores from each individual hole are added together to provide the total score for the 18 holes. Each hole also has an assigned number of shots, called par, that a proficient golfer is expected to finish in. Holes can be par 3, par

4, or par 5. For example, for a par 3, the golfer is expected to complete the hole in three shots (par), theoretically by landing on the green from the tee and finishing in two putts. Golf also has names for scores below and above par on a single hole. For example, if a golfer takes five shots on a par 4, that's one over par or a "bogey." Six shots is a "double bogey." A score of one stroke better than par (i.e., a 2 on a par 3) is a "birdie." If a golfer beats par by two strokes, they have made an "eagle." In our OWI courses, grading contracts operate similarly. These documents also help students track their progress toward meeting course requirements and assignment criteria. They employ specialized terms such as "complete" and "incomplete," with which students must be familiar in order to understand the contract and use it to measure their progress. However, while par represents a pre-established measure to which golfers aspire, grading contracts allow students to be involved in defining what "par" means in OWI, and they have multiple opportunities during a semester to meet or exceed "par." In a labor-based grading contract, "par" is associated with meeting collaboratively determined standards for labor rather than meeting some pre-determined, subjective standard of proficiency. For this reason, labor-based contract grading, which makes student labor in the course the basis for assessment, has been identified as a more equitable method of assessment for the types of diverse learners that populate online writing courses.

According to Inoue (2019), contract grading is more equitable because it makes "all final course grades more accessible to every student in the room, regardless of the languages they practice, their linguistic backgrounds, or most other social dimensions" (p. 140). Additionally, labor-based grading contracts work against the assumption that some students bring to their online courses that they are "correspondence like" (Borgman & McArdle, 2019, p. 30) since, if we value students' labor in an online course, then clearly the course is not just a checklist of tasks to complete as quickly as possible. For these reasons, labor-based contract grading can be an appealing response strategy to use in OWI. Nevertheless, this strategy can be difficult to implement effectively in OWI due to students' unfamiliarity with this assessment method and the constraints imposed by learning management system (LMS) technologies. These challenges can lead to user experience problems for instructors and students that leave students confused about course grades and instructors discouraged from using grading contracts. In this chapter, we contend that a student-centered design approach is necessary to use grading contracts as an effective response strategy in OWI, and we share the grading contract documents we use in our own online classes and discuss how these are designed around students and their needs.

Benefits of Labor-Based Grading Contracts in OWI

Labor-based contract grading is particularly well-suited for use in OWI. As the scholarship on OWI indicates, online learners are generally very diverse (Cleary et al., 2019). Borgman and McArdle (2019) explain that "[o]nline courses and de-

grees have an appeal that reaches diverse students—the returning full-time working student with a family, the part-time student with a family, the military student stationed overseas, the former college student dropout who is returning to school after a larger break spent working" (p. 77). In addition to diversity in age and life experience, diversity in OWI also takes many other forms including gender and ethnic diversity (Clinefelter et al., 2019), varying degrees of English speaking and preparation for college (Borgman & McArdle, 2019), differing levels of technological access and knowledge (Greer & Harris, 2018), and differences in learning styles and abilities (Borgman & Dockter, 2018). Labor-based grading contracts are a good choice for use with such diverse groups of students because they take into account and reward students for their effort. In conventional models of assessment, student labor often goes unnoticed and unrewarded as the "quality" of student work is the factor that determines student grades. As Inoue (2019) explains, although "[a]ll pedagogies ask students to labor. . . .They usually ignore the actual labor of learning in favor of systems that judge the so-called quality of the outcomes of student labor, favoring a single judge's (the teacher's) decisions about the quality of the products of labor" (p. 129). The result of prioritizing quality over labor is that "conventional grading systems . . . often are unfair to diverse groups of students," as "quality" is determined by a single measure and often represents inequitable language standardization (Inoue, 2019, p. 61).

The use of a labor-based grading contract works to remedy this. The grading contract delineates the number of tasks students must complete in order to earn their desired course grade. Essentially, the more labor a student does, the better their course grade will be. Quality is separated from the course grade; though quality remains a focus of class discussions, activities, and peer- and instructor-feedback (see Appendix A for our sample grading contract). The grading contract is also a group-authored document in which students and faculty collaboratively make assessment decisions through negotiation and class discussions. Instructors decide whether they want to extend this collaboration to a single element in the grading contract (such as participation), or into all elements of the contract (such as deciding the amount of labor required to earn a "B" in the course). We have found that involving students in assessment decision-making leads to increased investment in the course and contributes to an increased sense of community, both of which are particularly important in online courses as "[r]esearch demonstrates that classes taught with high rapport (defined as high levels of faculty/student presence and engagement) can increase retention by up to 40 percent" (Greer & Harris, 2018, p. 23). In her study of rapport-building strategies in online courses, Glazier (2019) found that "[a]lthough rapport cannot change students' level of preparedness or the personal life circumstances that may prove challenging in any given semester, rapport just may help students cope with those challenges. The data clearly show that rapport helps them to be more successful" (p. 449). Labor-based grading contracts provide opportunities to build rapport and increase engagement as instructors and students work together to define the parameters of

the grading contract. These documents provide a focal point for discussing how students' work is assessed throughout the course—conversations that we encourage at the level of the whole class via LMS discussion boards focused on aspects of the grading contract and individually as students email us with questions or visit us during online office hours to discuss their progress in class.

For these reasons, contract grading has been framed as a method of assessment that encourages student learning (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Inoue, 2019), furthers critical pedagogy (Shor, 1996; Thelin, 2005), and provides the opportunity to enact socially-just, antiracist assessment practices (Inoue, 2015, 2019). Inoue (2019) has further identified three primary benefits of using grading contracts in writing classes: they eliminate quality-based judgments of student performance, provide students and teachers with the opportunity to critically evaluate how language is used (and privileged) in various ecologies, and give students the space to try new things without the risk of losing points (reframing failure as something more productive). While little scholarship considers grading contracts in OWI specifically, we have found that these benefits have been maintained in our own online writing courses. Further, research has called for the use of social contracts in OWI (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015) and an emphasis on fairness in online writing assessment (Sapp & Simon, 2005). While there is a need for additional research on the degree to which grading contracts influence different diversities, we believe that the use of a grading contract works to create and maintain equitable spaces in which diverse student populations can succeed in their online courses.

Challenges to Implementing Grading Contracts in OWI

Despite the benefits of grading contracts for OWI, they can be difficult to implement effectively both because of the complexity of introducing students to a new method of grading in an online environment and because of the ways that LMSs shape and constrain grading practices. Previous research on student perceptions of grading contracts has found that in face-to-face (F2F) contexts, some students resist the use of contract grading. For example, Inman and Powell (2018) report that although students in their study acknowledged that the grading contract allowed them to focus on improving their writing and encouraged risk-taking, they still preferred receiving conventional grades on their work (pp. 39-40).

Mikenna conducted an informal survey about contract grading during the second half of the spring 2020 semester and found different results. While half of her students did express a preference for conventional grades, half of them also indicated that they preferred the grading contract. Interestingly, among those who preferred conventional grades, they indicated that this preference was due to their familiarity with conventional grading methods. Though much of students' resistance to grading contracts may be evidence of what hooks (2014) identifies as the pain associated with giving up old ways of thinking and assessment methods such as the use of points or percentages that students are used to, it does point out

the need to communicate clearly with students about a new method of grading in OWI. As Borgman and McArdle (2019) emphasize, "[o]ften a lot of the headaches that occur in online courses happen because of the gap in understanding of what is expected from each party involved, instructor and student" (pp. 73-74). Communicating clearly and frequently with students via secure course and campus communication tools about how they will be assessed is always an important way for instructors to be responsive to students in OWI, and being responsive is especially necessary when using a method of assessment that is likely to be unfamiliar to students such as labor-based contract grading.

Additionally, it is crucial to be strategic in designing grading contract documents for use in OWI because the systems design approach operative in most LMSs makes it impossible to simply migrate grading contracts as they are implemented in F2F courses into OWI. Within systems design, LMS system requirements and limitations determine use of the LMS, and the result is frequently, as Harris and Greer (2017) discuss, that LMS technologies "create spaces that are constrained in particular ways that affect and often restrict student access and learning" (p. 48). In the case of grading contracts, LMS technologies narrowly limit the options that instructors have for providing grades to students in ways that strongly push instructors toward quality-based assessment. Instructors who want to implement contract grading within LMSs often resort to "hacking" their LMS's grading tools, which predictably leads to student confusion.

During May 2020, a discussion thread on the WPA listserv titled "Contract and Specifications Grading on Canvas" documented a number of difficulties that instructors have implementing contract grading in LMSs. Grover (2020) posted the initial query, explaining in his post that though he liked

> the idea of [students] being able to see their grades and access feedback whenever and however they want, in a familiar and secure interface, and I like having the assignment due dates linked to the calendar Canvas generates for them—I just don't like all the baggage that Canvas forces on me to take advantage of these things.

List members replied with a number of creative ways that they have implemented grading contracts in LMSs (not just in Canvas), but as Evans (2020) noted, many of these represented "ungrading 'hacks'" more than real solutions, leading her to conclude that "the LMS grading paradigm just can't be manipulated into a grading contract." Though instructors can and do find workaround solutions, these often confuse students as to how they are being graded, as several posters also confirmed in the listserv discussion.

Angela's efforts to make Canvas gradebook and assignment tools work with the course grading contract demonstrate both the possibilities for and difficulties of working within the limitations of the LMS. Though the workaround solutions available to an instructor will vary depending on the institutional LMS in use and

an instructor's preferences, Angela adapts the Canvas settings, gradebook, and assignments tools to accommodate contract grading by taking the following steps:

Under "enabled course grading scheme" in Canvas course settings, Angela sets her own GPA scale for the course as depicted in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1. The custom grading scheme Angela sets up in Canvas settings.

In Canvas Assignments, Angela creates an assignment called "Fulfillment of the Course Grading Contract." Then she uses "assignment groups weight" in Canvas Assignments to set all of the assignment groups at 0% of total except for the Fulfillment of the Course Grading Contract assignment, which she weights at 100% of total (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2. How weighted assignments in Canvas Assignments are configured so the Grading Contract is 100%.

When Angela creates an assignment in Canvas, she uses the settings in Figure 7.3. This means that when she grades students' writing, they see "complete," "incomplete," or "missing" for their assignment (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.3. How Angela configures an assignment's settings so it uses her custom grading scheme.

Angela sets all students' grades for the "Fulfillment of the Course Grading Contract" Assignment to 85% at the beginning of the semester to reflect the fact that if they complete the grading contract they will receive a B for the course (see Figure 7.4). As the semester progresses, she adjusts this percentage as needed.

Week 15 Discussion Post Weekly Online Learning Activities	0 (missing)	0	ⓘ🗗
ePortfolio ePortfolio Projects	0 (complete)	0	ⓘ🗗
Fulfillment of Course Grading Contract Fulfillment of Course Grading Contract	85 (B)	85	🗗🗂

Figure 7.4. A student's view of the gradebook in Canvas after Angela
implements her custom grading scheme, weights assignments
so that the grading contract assignment is weighted at 100%,
and sets the default grade for the grading contract at 85%.

By taking steps like these, we are able to force the Canvas gradebook to represent student grades consistent with our grading contract, but this workaround—like other workarounds we have tried—is still not optimal. This particular workaround not only requires instructors to take several non-intuitive steps in order to implement, but also still confuses students who see 0's listed for their assignments alongside the word "complete." Nevertheless, the desire to implement grading contracts within the LMS is understandable since institutions provide more technical support for LMSs than they do for external platforms (which they may not support at all), and some instructors are required to house grading within their institution's mandated LMS and to report grades from within the LMS as well. However, the poor user experience that often results from this systems design process discourages many instructors from implementing a form of assessment particularly well-suited to OWI. Consequently, even though we have found ways to make Canvas (mostly) represent grades the way we want, these "hacks" do not constitute our strategy for response in our classes. Rather, they illustrate the limitations of the systems design approach. In contrast, we advocate for a student-centered design approach that emphasizes communicating clearly with students about assessment procedures and that uses tools within and outside the LMS as needed to do so.

Developing a Strategy for Being Responsive

The technical challenges of implementing grading contracts in LMSs serve as a good reminder that, as Borgman and McArdle (2019) contend, "elements of face-to-face courses can rarely be successfully migrated into online ones" (p. 73). Instead, implementing grading contracts effectively in OWI requires an instructor to be both responsive and strategic, as Borgman and McArdle (2019) describe these elements of their PARS approach to OWI. While being responsive concerns

"setting boundaries for instruction/grading/virtual availability," being strategic refers to "architecting an experience" (Borgman & McArdle, 2019, p. 3) that is "focused on the user experience of the students" (p. 71). Taken together, these two pillars of the PARS approach suggest that instructors should develop a strategy for being responsive based on their understanding of who their students are and what they need. Indeed, in OWI, having a strategy for being responsive is arguably even more important than in F2F contexts because, as Warnock (2015) explains, "feedback provides students with their most individualized teaching experience in online settings" (p. 166). Because students cannot quickly ask clarifying questions in person about feedback or course grades, it is especially important for instructors to communicate clearly with students about how and when their work is being assessed. At the same time, because students in OWI write even more than students in F2F courses, it is easy for online writing instructors to become overwhelmed by trying to respond to all of the writing that students produce in an online writing course or even to keep up with student emails inquiring about course grades and feedback. For this reason, Borgman and McArdle (2019) advise that "[t]he goal of being responsive is to help you maintain a high level of interaction with your students while not getting buried under the avalanche of emails and essays" (p. 65). In other words, being responsive means developing a clear strategy for response that will help students and the instructor have a better experience in OWI.

A student-centered design approach is necessary to develop an effective strategy for being responsive in OWI. Student-centered design, which is based on Blythe's (2001) user-centered design (UCD) approach, places students and their needs at the center of online course design rather than system requirements and limitations. Student-centered design is collaborative and recursive, as "teachers and students must be present in the time and space of the class to work within and beyond the constraints of institutional LMS platforms and design and employ learning spaces that achieve this more collaborative model of student-instructor co-creation" (Harris & Greer, 2017, p. 48). Additionally, instructors using student-centered design draw flexibly from available tools and apps to help them meet student needs rather than limiting themselves to the tools offered by one mandated LMS. As Harris and Greer (2017) explain, "[w]e are moving beyond a time when a single LMS will be workable for all students in all situations, toward a new, more flexible model that sees technology as an ecosystem of interlocking tools and applications rather than as a single, one-size-fits-all platform" (p. 51). Like UCD, student-centered design is based on our actual observations of students using technology and attempts to design online learning spaces around students' observed needs. For example, when we observe students (and instructors) struggling to understand and use LMS gradebook tools for contract grading applications, it is clear that we need to design different types of documents and processes to make contract grading more effective in OWI. The complexity of students' needs and desires when it

comes to assessment also illustrates why student-centered design is not synonymous with UCD. While UCD typically emphasizes how a user completes a single task, students have complex interactions in online courses. In the case of assessment documents, students might interact with these documents to get a sense for their current grade in a course, plan what they think is necessary in the future in order to achieve the course grade they desire, understand how an instructor assesses their writing, and seek feedback that can help them to improve their performance or meet the instructor's expectations, among other reasons. In other words, we cannot simply design our courses to ensure that students can, for example, find their grade on an assignment. From our observations of and interactions with students in OWI, we know that this would only partially address students' needs and that they may need other information to help them understand what a grade means or how to use the information. Thus, though UCD provides a design process—involving user research, iterative design, and collaboration—that instructors can use to design online learning spaces for students, putting students—instead of users—at the center of design also means implementing this process within the enormously complex context of learning.

In our online courses, we have employed student-centered design to develop our strategy of using grading contracts to respond to students. Rather than designing our grading contracts based on the constraints and limitations of the LMS, we begin instead with our knowledge of our student users and their needs for timely, clear, and individualized response on their labor in our courses. To do this, we work within and outside of our institutional LMS as needed to capitalize on the strengths of different tools and applications to 1) create with students a grading contract that spells out exactly what constitutes participation and collaboration in the online course, 2) provide opportunities for our students to assess their own progress in meeting the requirements of the grading contract for each major course assignment and 3) provide a personalized grading contract for each student as a visual, interactive document that makes the different components students will be evaluated on highly visible and that records their progress throughout the semester. Together, these practices represent our strategy for responding to students in our online writing courses.

Collaboratively Authored Labor-Based Grading Contract

The labor-based grading contract document itself is the most distinctive feature of contract grading (see Appendix A for the grading contract we use). Labor-based grading contracts frequently stand apart from other assessment tools by their length. The sample grading contract that Inoue (2019) published as an appendix to Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom and has made available to other instructors as a PDF, is seven pages long (wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/labor/appen-

dixa.pdf). Grading contracts are lengthy because in addition to detailing required elements of the course, they must clearly educate students about this often new and unfamiliar form of grading and define exactly how students' work will be assessed in the class. The grading contract thus often explains the rationale for using labor-based contract grading, defines key terms, and details the requirements for achieving an A, B, C and so forth in the course. There are a number of ways that instructors might choose to define the terms used in their grading contracts. In his sample grading contract, Inoue (2019) uses the terms "complete and on time work" and "late or incomplete work" to distinguish between assignments (p. 332). Similarly, we generally use "complete" and "incomplete" to distinguish between assignments in need of additional revision and those that have satisfied assignment requirements. Other instructors might prefer language such as "unsatisfactory," "satisfactory," or "satisfactory plus," or the terms "needs revision/developing," "meets expectations," and "exceeds expectations."

There can be problems with presenting such important and potentially confusing information to students in a lengthy document, particularly in an online class. Online instructors are encouraged to "chunk" information to make it more readable and improve student engagement and comprehension (Malamed, 2009; Miller, 1956). Consequently, based on what we know about our students' needs for a thorough introduction to a new method of assessment along with what we know about their needs for course content to be organized into manageable chunks, we create an entire module in our online courses outlining how contract grading will work (see Figure 7.5). The module allows us to chunk information so students don't get overwhelmed by being confronted by one long contract document, to include as many details as we need to provide, and to set completion of the grading contract module as a prerequisite for other course content to open for students.

Figure 7.5. An example of a grading contract module in Canvas.

Additionally, most labor-based grading contracts include a collaborative element where students and faculty work together to define certain elements of the contract, such as participation and collaboration. In our classes, we tend to use the LMS discussion board to facilitate this collaboration, but instructors could use whatever tool they prefer to foster collaboration (Google Docs, etc.). We have collaborated with our students on defining B-level participation in the course as completing 80 percent of their weekly online learning activities, and we have defined citizenship as responding to one another with respect and compassion throughout the semester. While these collaborative elements are typically outlined at the beginning of the course, it is important to check in with the class throughout the semester or at the midpoint of the semester to see if any changes to the contract need to be made. Because this method of assessment is new to most students, they may not immediately have concerns with the contract; however, as students gain familiarity with this method of assessment, class discussions often result in the renegotiation of elements of the grading contract beyond participation and collaboration, and begin to include discussions of fair labor processes. In OWI, instructors may want to initiate these dialogues privately by way of a writing warm-up or a survey using Google Forms in order "to be sensitive to students' privacy and unease with sharing potentially personal information with the class as a whole" (Inoue, 2019, pp. 229-230), after which the conversation can move onto a more public forum, such as Google Docs or a discussion post on institutional LMS platforms.

Self-Assessment Forms

We have found that to improve student understanding of and communication around the grading contract in online classes it is not enough only to provide the contract to students at the beginning of the term. Most students are unfamiliar with grading contract assessment and benefit from opportunities to see how it is being used throughout the semester to assess their work and how criteria such as "complete" or "incomplete" are applied. To help improve student fluency with grading contract language and provide opportunities for self-assessment, we have developed a self-assessment form (see Appendix B) that we modify for each course assignment that is included on the grading contract. This helps students to gain familiarity in using the language of the grading contract and experience in assessing their own labor and performance in the course. It also helps students to create a revision plan for their assignments that they can implement to improve their writing in subsequent drafts. Students can also be involved in the process of creating the grading criteria for each course assignment, which further encourages student and faculty collaboration.

There are many ways instructors can introduce the self-assessment form to their students. In her class, Mikenna uses course communication tools both inside and outside of her institutional LMS to introduce the self-assessment form.

She starts by creating a Weekly Online Learning Activity as an assignment in Canvas. For this activity, students are asked to read a sample student paper that is housed in a Google Doc. They are then instructed to review the assignment directions and grading criteria, then fill out the self-assessment form as if the paper was their own. This type of scaffolding activity gives students the opportunity to try out the self-assessment form before using it to assess their own written work, and provides instructors the opportunity to comment on how students are filling out the form and clearly communicate how the grading criteria (whether they were collaboratively constructed or not) are being applied to the writing task at hand. After this activity, Mikenna asks her students to use the self-assessment form as a cover page on the first draft of each of their ePortfolio Projects.

Individualized Grading Contract

Finally, we use the collaboratively-authored grading contract to create an interactive, individualized grading contract for each student that is updated throughout the course (see Appendix C for our sample individualized grading contract). The individual grading contract clearly shows each student where they stand in relation to completing contract requirements, allowing them to keep track of which course requirements they have completed and what they still need to spend more time on. For online courses, it can be helpful to update these weekly for the sake of clarity and clear communication, but instructors can also update them after each major assignment or at other specified times such as at midterms and again before the end of the semester—as long as students are informed ahead of time when they will receive these updates. Individual grading contracts are interactive since instructors add to them throughout the semester, but also links to assignments or instructor feedback can be added to the contract as well depending on the program the instructor uses to make them. The main concern with these documents is that instructors ensure they are private since they include student grade data. For this reason, we have found that it makes sense to create and maintain these documents using a program like Word or Pages, which allows us to save them on our secure personal computers. These programs also support hyperlinking and elements of visual design if instructors wish to make them more interactive. For example, an instructor might add a hyperlink to direct a student to a web resource related to a particular writing issue they need to work on. To share the documents with students, we upload them to the "Fulfillment of the Course Grading Contract" assignment we have created in Canvas assignments. This method ensures that students' grade information is kept secure in compliance with FERPA regulations and can also satisfy any institutional policies that grading take place within the mandated LMS.

Not only does our individualized grading contract represent a more personalized response strategy, but also a more equitable one. As previously mentioned, labor-based grading contracts are generally more equitable because they make

all course grades more accessible to all students (Inoue, 2019); however, the unfamiliar contract language coupled with the limitations of LMS gradebooks often lead to student confusion. Our individualized grading contract works to remedy this while also providing students the opportunity to ask questions about course assignments and their course grade. For example, a returning full-time working student with a family might find the individualized grading contract particularly helpful because they may not have the ability to meet with their instructor during regular business hours to inquire about their progress in the course. The individualized grading contract provides such students with a quick point of reference in regard to their course grade and labor progress. It also gives such students the opportunity to review, leave comments on, and ask questions about their individualized grading contract whenever they sit down to work on their coursework—whether that be in the morning before they head to work, or late at night after their children have gone to bed. This flexibility, alongside the clarification we hope this individualized grading contract provides, works to further the equitable assessment practices we use in OWI.

Final Thoughts and Application

The documents described above represent our attempt to implement contract grading in OWI in a way that is student-friendly and helps all our students succeed, regardless of the student diversity represented in our classes. It is helpful to think of this in terms of golf and we envision the golf analogy of moving toward a more equitable scorecard for the students in our courses. In golf, obviously, the goal is to make pars, birdies, and eagles while avoiding bogeys, double bogeys, and worse. In other words, scorecards help golfers to track exactly how they are performing for each hole and to measure their performance against par. Additionally, over time, this record helps golfers to track their improvement and identify areas they need to work on. In order to work, scorecards have to be easy to understand and use. Golfers also have to understand the language of scorekeeping to appreciate that making a birdie is preferable to making a bogey. The fact that golfers use the scorecard after every hole ensures their familiarity and usefulness in helping golfers improve their performance on particular holes and their overall score through practice.

Labor-based grading contracts operate similarly in OWI. We recommend that instructors design labor-based grading contracts for easy reading and comprehension in order to communicate to students exactly how many assignments and activities a student needs to complete to succeed in the course and the criteria for successfully completing each assignment or activity (what we might think of as par for each assignment). We also suggest that students be provided with opportunities to interact with grading contract documents often enough that they become familiar with them and fluent in the assessment language used in the course—whether this is "complete and incomplete" or "still developing, satisfac-

tory, and exceeds expectations." Lastly, we urge instructors to provide individual progress reports to students regularly as they complete the grading contract requirements as to provide feedback on both their performance on specific assignments and activities as well as on their overall course progress.

By using Borgman and McArdle's PARS elements responsive and strategic along with labor-based grading contracts, instructors can make assessment more equitable for the diverse students in OWI. Since our students bring with them a wide variety of experiences, differences, and abilities, making labor the basis for assessment helps to ensure that all our students can succeed in our courses. In OWI, it is equally important to implement this response strategy by designing grading contract documents that are student-centered and aid in comprehension. Since the documents that we provide to students in OWI constitute their experience and understanding of the course even more than they do for students in F2F courses, it is essential that those documents do not further confuse students about how they are being graded or where they stand in the course, but rather support the work of student learning.

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Appendix A. Sample Grading Contract

This grading contract, which is an adaptation of Inoue's (2019), represents a version of a grading contract that Mikenna has negotiated with students in her first-year writing course.

Course Grading

This class is assessed using a labor-based grading contract. You will not be given a point value per assignment; instead, your grade will be entirely determined by the labor you put into your coursework. While I will not grade you based on the

quality of your work, all of the feedback you receive, as well as our discussions and activities, will be about the quality of your work and how you can grow as a reader, writer, and researcher.

In this class we will also try to create a community of compassion, a group of people who genuinely care about the wellbeing of each other—and part of that caring, that compassion, is doing things for each other. It turns out, this also helps you learn. The best way to learn is to teach others, to help, to serve. So we will function as collaborators, allies with various skills, abilities, experiences, and talents that we offer the group, rather than opponents working against each other for grades or a teacher's approval.

The default grade for the class is a "B." If you do all that is asked of you in the spirit it is asked, then you will get a "B." If you turn in assignments late, forget to do assignments, etc., your grade will be lower. If you put in more labor by completing one of our two optional projects, you will get an "A."

I know this all sounds very different—it is very different than how we've been taught grades "should" work. I imagine you have some questions, so here are some FAQs to get us started:

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a grading contract?

A contract is "a binding agreement between two or more persons or parties" (Merriam-Webster).

A *grading contract*, then, is an agreement between the students and the instructor about the work that needs to be done in order to earn a specific grade.

What is labor?

"Labor is work the body does over time" (Inoue, 2019, p. 129).

Why do we use a grading contract in this course?

"Teachers often take for granted that students must labor in order to learn. They must read or write, take notes or discuss. However, typical grading systems rarely account for students' labor in any way. They usually ignore the actual labor of learning in favor of systems that judge the so-called quality of the outcomes of student labor, favoring a single judge's (the teacher's) decisions about the quality of the products of labor. Because labor is neglected in such conventional grading systems, they often are unfair to diverse groups of students. Labor-based grading contracts attempt to correct this problem" (Inoue, 2019, p. 129).

"Grades tend to diminish students' interest in whatever they're learning. Grades create a preference for the easiest possible task. Grades tend to reduce the quality of students' thinking. While it's true that many students, after a few years of traditional schooling, could be described as motivated by grades, what counts is the nature of their motivation. Extrinsic motivation, which includes a desire

to get better grades, is not only different from, but often undermines, intrinsic motivation, a desire to learn for its own sake" (Kohn, 2013, p. 144).

Important Terms

Complete Assignments

An assignment will be considered "complete" if it meets all of the criteria listed on the assignment sheet and is turned in on time.

To earn a "B" in this class, all of your ePortfolio Projects must be "complete" after you submit the Final ePortfolio.

Incomplete Assignments

An assignment will be considered "incomplete" if it does not meet all of the criteria listed on the assignment sheet.

If you receive an "incomplete" on an ePortfolio Project, you will have the opportunity to revise for a "complete" in your Final ePortfolio; however, there must be evidence of **substantive** revision, reflection, and effort.

To earn a "B" in this class, you cannot have any "incomplete" ePortfolio Projects after you submit your Final ePortfolio.

Late Assignments

An assignment will be considered "late" if it is turned in after the deadline listed on Canvas. All of our assignments and their due dates are listed on Canvas under the "Syllabus" tab.

To earn a "B" in this class, you can turn in one ePortfolio Project late throughout the semester. However, this paper must (1) be "complete" when it is turned in and (2) be turned in within 48 hours of its original due date to avoid receiving a grade of "missing." For example, if a paper was due on Friday, May 1st at 11:59 p.m., that paper must be completed and turned in by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday the 3rd.

Missing Assignments

Any ePortfolio Projects not done period, or "missing," for whatever reason, are put into this category.

To earn a "B" in this class, you cannot have any missing ePortfolio Projects.

If any of the ePortfolio Projects become "missing," it constitutes an automatic failure of the course. Please reach out to me if you ever find yourself struggling to complete our coursework on time—we can work together to come up with a solution.

Weekly Online Learning Activities

Weekly online learning activities constitute the assignments you would complete in class if we were meeting in a face-to-face format. This includes assignments

like peer review workshops, discussion posts, and informal assignments.

Weekly online learning activities cannot be made up after their deadline. If you submit a weekly online learning activity on time, it will be "complete." Even complete online learning activities will often receive feedback in order to help you improve in the future.

To earn a "B" in this class, 80% of your weekly online learning activities must be "complete."

Below is a table that shows the main components of our course contract.

Desired Course Grade	# of Complete ePortfolio Projects	# of Incomplete ePortfolio Projects	# of Late ePortfolio Projects	# of Missing ePortfolio Projects	% of Weekly Online Learning Activities Completed on Time
A (4.0)	5	0	0	0	≥90%
B (3.1)	4	0	1	0	≥80%
C (2.1)	3	1	2	0	≥70%
D (1.1)	2	2	3	1	≥60%
F (0.0)	0	4	4	2	<60%

In addition to updating our gradebook in Canvas, I will also give you an individual grading contract that will be updated once a week as we complete our course assignments. This individual contract should help you manage the assignments you need to complete to earn your desired course grade.

I know more questions will arise throughout the semester. Please, never hesitate to ask me questions about the grading contract, your standing in the class, your writing, etc. I am here to help you be successful!

Appendix B. Self-Assessment Form

This form represents one way that Mikenna reminds her students how they are being assessed in the course and helps her students to become fluent in grading contract language.

> Directions: Please fill out the following self-assessment form and submit it along with your first draft of ePortfolio Project #3. First, please comment on what you've done well and what you still want to improve on during revision. Then, tell me whether you think that the labor you have put into this paper earns a "complete" or "incomplete" grade.
>
> Note: If you have completely ignored one of the following grading criteria, your paper is likely "incomplete."

Done Well	Grading Criteria	Revision To-Do's
	Criterion #1. Did you clearly state your specific research question?	
	Criterion #2. Did you use *at least* five sources (four peer-reviewed sources and one webpage) to support your inquiry? Did you thoroughly analyze these sources?	
	Criterion #3. Did you organize your paper logically? Did you use subheadings? Remember, at a minimum you need to have: (1) an introduction section, (2) a section for your research question, (3) a problem section, (4) a solutions section, and (5) a conclusions section.	
	Criterion #4. Did you thoroughly develop all of your main points? Be sure to explain to your reader *why* your research question is important, *what* the problem is, and *how* they can solve this problem.	
	Criterion #5. Did you write a paper that is 2,000–3,000 words long? A paper that is not *at least* 2,000 words long will automatically receive an "incomplete" and is not eligible to submit in the Final ePortfolio. This does not include any images, graphs, or your Works Cited page.	
	Criterion #6. Did you incorporate peer-feedback and make substantial revisions from draft 1 to draft 2?	

Based on the above criteria, is your paper "Complete" or "Incomplete"? Explain your reasoning.

Appendix C. Example of an Interactive, Personalized Grading Contract

This individualized contract is updated weekly to help students track their progress toward meeting grading contract requirements.

Individual Grading Contract

Category	Task	To earn a "B"	Marcus
ePortfolio Projects	Project #1: Literacy Narrative	All projects must be "complete" after submitting the ePortfolio	✓
	Project #2: Book Review		✓
	Project #3: Edited Collection		
	Project #4: Final Reflection		
	Project #5: English 121 Reflections *or* Project #6: A Letter to Tara Westover	Optional to qualify for an "A"	If you are aiming for an "A," be sure to complete one of these assignments & submit it in the Final ePortfolio.
Final ePortfolio	Final ePortfolio must be "complete"	✓	
Process Work	Revision	You make substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up	✓ You have done a great job with your revisions between drafts! I appreciate how thoughtfully you integrate your colleagues' feedback into your writing.
	Deadlines	Submit no more than 1 late ePortfolio Project	✓

Category	Task	To earn a "B"	Marcus
Weekly Online Learning Activities	Regularly complete weekly online assignments	≥80% of weekly online learning activities completed on time	✓
	Regularly complete weekly readings		✓
	Peer-Review Workshops		✓ So far, you have completed 2 of the 4 peer-review workshops.
	ePortfolio Link Checks		X I cannot access all of the documents on the "Education" page of your ePortfolio. Can you make sure your link sharing permissions are set to "anyone with link can view"? Once you make this change, your "incomplete" grade will become "complete."
	Post on our weekly discussion board & thoughtfully reply at least 2 times		X This is the fourth week you have not posted on our weekly discussion board. Is there something I can do to help you be more successful on this part of our contract? How can we make this labor more manageable?
Citizenship	Respond to one another with respect and compassion	✓	✓ Your peer-feedback shows a deep respect for your colleagues' labor and writing.

Note: I will update this document once a week so that you always know where you stand in the course. If you ever have any questions about the class, your labor, etc., please do not hesitate to send me an email or stop by my virtual office hours (W 10-11am).