

Committee on Educational Policy
Advisory Guidelines on Writing Undergraduate Performance (Narrative) Evaluations

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

Senate Regulation 9.2.1 on written evaluations refers readers to "CEP Advisory Guidelines on Writing Narrative Evaluations." In its report to the Senate on November 9, 2000, CEP stated it would "submit for Senate review new Advisory Guidelines to make explicit the flexibility and options for preparing narrative evaluations." Last May, CEP invited members of the Senate to comment on a draft. We now present a revised version of the Advisory Guidelines which will serve until such time as CEP deems it expedient or necessary to make additions or revisions.

Respectfully submitted,

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(Narrative) Evaluations

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1. Introduction

In the year 2000, UCSC adopted a revised student evaluation system that added mandatory letter grades, previously a student's option, to the existing performance evaluation system. This revision established a parallel system of letter grades and GPAs at UCSC. It did not replace written performance evaluations nor did it modify that system or its scope. Written performance evaluations continue to anchor a system that encourages students and instructors to get to know one another, that allows instructors to acknowledge and document the full range of student achievement, and that can provide much more information than do conventional transcripts.

Almost from the founding of the campus, UCSC has used written performance evaluations to evaluate student performance, rather than relying solely on conventional letter grades. This practice reflects our conviction that the results of higher education cannot be adequately summarized in a single, one-dimensional measure, namely an A, B, C, D or F. Our performance evaluation system has proven valuable to students and the faculty and is viewed in retrospect by many of our alumni as one of UCSC's most valuable features.

Research indicates that students' understanding is promoted by environments that prioritize learning goals and evaluate performance in ways that are closely tied to processes of learning and instruction (see the National Academy of Sciences report: "How People Learn," 1999). Viewing a situation as an opportunity for learning—as opposed to merely a validation of ability—induces students to choose more challenging tasks, persevere in the face of difficulties, perceive instructors and peers as resources rather than as potential obstacles, and develop long-term interest.

According to many UCSC students and graduates, this form of assessment can help students distinguish their strong and weak areas and detect patterns in their performance across quarters. It can focus their efforts on improvement, encourage them to go beyond expectations, and help them learn to collaborate, creating an intellectual culture in which students with different talents and perspectives learn to respect differences rather than compete with one another along a single dimension of performance.

In order for the performance evaluation system to flourish, it is important for instructors to understand the system and to find ways of writing evaluations that work for them in their courses. The performance evaluation system acknowledges the tremendous variations of classroom environments, evaluation strategies, and logistic concerns from course to course across our campus. The performance evaluation system presents a set of tools that are flexible, individual, and powerful. It does not impose stylistic uniformity, nor does it mandate uniform expectations of instructors. Rather, it offers each instructor the means to evaluate students as best fits the course and the student. This guide details the performance evaluation system at UCSC and provides helpful tips, some recommendations, and a catalog of sample student evaluations including a sample transcript. The latter are intended to document the rich variety of written evaluation possible within the performance evaluation system and to offer ideas and templates for evaluation writers.

2. Senate regulations regarding performance evaluation

9.2.1 At the end of the term, each instructor teaching a credit-granting course shall prepare a written evaluation for each student who receives a grade of P, A, B, C, or D in his or her class. The narrative evaluation must evaluate the quality and characteristics of the student's performance in the class.

- 16.2.1 Each instructor in a graduate course shall prepare a written evaluation at the end of the term for each graduate student in his or her class who takes the course for credit.
- 9.2.2 Evaluations are to be filed with the Registrar and the student's college at the time of filing the end-of-term course reports or no later than 15 working days after the close of the term.
- 16.3.1 An appeal may be filed if the student is persuaded that the instructor has given a grade notation or narrative evaluation based on:
- A. inappropriate criteria such as race, politics, religion, age, sex, or national origin.
 - B. capricious or arbitrary application of appropriate criteria in a manner not reflective of student performance in relation to course requirement.

These regulations can be faithfully redacted as follows: *The instructor of record must submit a performance evaluation for each undergraduate student who receives credit for the course and for all graduate students enrolled. The evaluation must describe, and is limited to, the quality and characteristics of the student's work. It is due 15 working days after the end of the quarter.*

With the exception of excluding clearly inappropriate material, the only requirement on evaluations' content set by Senate regulations is that they describe the "quality and characteristics of the student's work." No list of characteristics is provided, nor is there any expectation determining length, thoroughness, or specific content. The decision on how best to describe the quality and characteristics of student work is yours. You may decide to write highly individual evaluations of each student. You may decide to use a spreadsheet macro to transform your grade sheets into descriptive text or to drive menus and grids. Performance evaluations may simply state the grade received, they may go further and contextualize the grade awarded the student, or they may be more synthetic. It is left to the instructor of record to decide what form of evaluation is most efficient, effective, and appropriate for your course and your students.

3. Examples of performance evaluation

To demonstrate the flexibility and power of performance evaluations, we offer the following examples. The course title is in **bold** face; course descriptions are in *italic* face. A longer list of sample evaluations can be found in the appendix.

Example #1:

Elementary Latin

The first quarter of Latin forms and syntax, using the Smith and Jones textbook. Evaluation based on class participation, quizzes, midterm and final examinations.

Grasp of Forms: Very Good

Grasp of Syntax: Good

Skill in Translating: Very Good

General Comments: Susan worked hard and the results were obvious. She needs only to tighten her knowledge of syntax a bit more. This was a B performance.

Example #2:

Introductory American Politics

Susan produced good work in the class by the end of the quarter. Her work showed marked improvement on both the short essays and the midterm and final exams. Her early essays were adequate, but did not always show a grasp of the material; her final essay, however, was of excellent quality, well argued and smartly written. Her midterm was quite an uneven effort. She easily passed the first half of the exam but failed to complete the essay portion. On the final, by far the most difficult exercise, Susan acquitted herself nicely. She demonstrated a competent grasp of the material necessary for an understanding of American political development. Aside from some minor conceptual confusion at the outset, the paper was a fine synthesis of course materials. Susan attended and participated in sections regularly, and gave a fine oral presentation of a chapter in Shell's *Time of Illusion*.

Example #3:

Introductory Physics

Overall Grade: B+

Performance on comprehensive final: Very good.

Performance on midterm exams: Very good.

Performance on homework: Excellent

Example #4:

Dante's Divine Comedy in Translation

Large lecture class (120 students) with weekly discussion section. Students read Dante's Vita Nuova and the Divine Comedy (Inferno, Purgatorio and selected canti from Paradiso.); selected lyrics from French and Italian courtly poetry; Books I-VI of Virgil's Aeneid. Two papers and a final exam were required.

Susan did satisfactory work in this course. She attended the required number of sections, but consistently arrived late to class and often missed material that could have benefited her greatly. Susan's written work was satisfactory overall. In her first paper, she raised some interesting and important points, and showed promising potential, but the paper was limited by the omission of an interpretive thesis position. In her second paper, Susan offered a competent discussion of the figures of Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro (Inferno 26-27) in terms of their similarity to Dante's own role as a political leader and poetic prophet. Although Susan did not consult any of the reserve book list critical essays on this canto, and thus did not present a clearly articulated interpretive thesis, she demonstrated understanding and control of the major issues of the episode. Susan's final exam was quite good--clearly the strongest work she turned in all quarter. Overall, Susan did passing work this quarter.

Example #5:

Calculus

Evaluations were based on the midterm (30%), a comprehensive final examination (40%) and 5 homework assignments (30%). Textbook: Jones and Smith, fourth edition.

Midterm: C

Final Exam: B-

Homework: B
Overall Grade: B-

Example #6:

Introduction to Human Evolution

This is a large lecture course accompanied by weekly lab-discussion sections. Evaluation is based on midterm and final essay exams, participation in weekly sections, and a term paper.

Susan's midterm showed a fair understanding of the issues but confusion about some concepts. Susan followed up by rewriting the problem areas on her test and working diligently to clear up these minor confusions. She improved her class performance by writing a very good final exam. Susan wrote a thoughtful term paper on primate communication. Susan was a dedicated member of her weekly discussion section, and contributed many good ideas and insights into the matters being discussed. Overall, Susan's mastery of the material presented in this class was good—a B.

Example #7:

Computer Organization

Introductory assembly language and computer architecture. Weekly programming assignments in MIPS (simulator) and HC11 (standalone microcontroller kit) assembly languages. 4 graded and 6 checked off programming assignments. Overall score composed of final (30%), weekly quizzes (35%), checked programs (10%), and graded programs (25%).

89 students with 78 taking final

	Score	Rank	Min	Max	Ave	SD
Graded Labs:	55	73	2	100	72	21
Chckd Labs:	62	76	20	100	82	18
Quizzes:	38	79	16	93	63	16
Final:	49	73	39	100	67	13
Overall:	48	78	7	97	66	20

Susan was a regular contributor to class. She occasionally received reduced scores on programming assignments due to the checkoff policy and not carefully reading assignment requirements. Even taking this into account, her final and quiz performances were poor.

Overall class performance: poor (D)

Example #8:

Physical Geology

Introductory course using Jones and Jones, 4th edition. Students assessed on three exams (50%), four homework assignments (35%) and section participation and project (15%). 95 students completed the course. There were 15 A's, 30 B's, 30 C's and 10 D's assigned.

Susan received scores of 100, 77, 88 and 74 on the four homework assignments (relative to class averages of 92, 86, 91 and 95, respectively). Compared to her peers, this is good work. She tended to do well with interpretation and synthesis, but struggled with more quantitative (numerical) questions. On the three exams, Susan earned scores of 77, 71 and 77 (relative to class averages of

71, 77 and 74) placing her right at the class average. Again, problems with quantitative questions, especially calculator exercises, were apparent. Her section project was a nicely researched and well-organized introduction to the geologic history of the Pinnacles National Monument. Overall, Susan's work was average.

Example #9:

Introductory Writing

In this introductory writing class, Susan Slug attended class regularly, contributing frequently and usefully to discussions. She satisfactorily completed five of six assigned essays, with revisions. After a somewhat uneven start to the quarter, Susan made substantial progress in explaining her ideas more clearly and coherently, adding greater depth to her analyses, and improving the accuracy of her proof reading and use of sources. Her final essay in a series of papers on the Napster controversy was particularly well done. When she adds discipline and careful revision to her considerable stylistic flair, Susan's essays are interesting and effective.

Example #10:

Beginning Sculpture

Sculpting techniques in ceramics, issues and concepts related to the body and its representation, approaches to the artistic process, the relationship of contemporary art to studio practice.

Susan's sculpting skills in this course were very good, her glazing and conceptual skills were good. Her fish sculpture showed very good use of texture and visually interesting form. A suggestion is that she take more risks with sculpture by working on more challenging forms and concepts. Susan was active in class discussions and participated in firing the kiln.

Example #11:

Chemistry: Independent Study

Susan completed her second quarter of independent research this quarter. She continued to do an outstanding job in the isolation of sesterterpenes from an Indo-Pacific marine sponge. The required reports, while terse, were submitted in a timely fashion and contained appropriate details on the progress of work in the laboratory. She also gave a very nice oral presentation at our most recent evening seminar event.

As is clear from the above and the appendix, performance evaluations may take many forms, allowing you to find the mode of evaluation that works best for you in your courses.

4. Who reads performance evaluations?

Performance evaluations written for all courses in which a student receives a P, A, B, C, or D become part of the student's permanent transcript and reach a large and diverse audience. In addition to the student, performance evaluations will be reviewed by college academic staff, by the student's department, and by anyone to whom a student opts to send the complete official transcript (grades and evaluations), including fellowship and scholarship review panels, graduate and professional school admissions committees and potential employers. Of this audience, only the

student has had access to instructor feedback, comments, and scores provided during the quarter—forms of "real-time" evaluation that should not be deferred to an end of quarter written evaluation. Bearing the audience in mind, performance evaluations should provide the necessary context to be understood by readers who were not in the course, don't have access to course materials or syllabi, and may not be familiar with narrative evaluation generally. In other words, you should write evaluations under the assumption that your audience lies outside UC Santa Cruz. Because outside readers may be overwhelmed by volume, we recommend that, except in extraordinary circumstances, each evaluation you write be succinct and less than 150 words in length.

Evaluations are not edited or proofread by anyone but you, but their audience is global. Please adhere to appropriate (proper) grammar and stylistic practices. What you write reflects on UCSC as a whole. See http://pio.ucsc.edu/style_guide.html for the official campus style guide.

5. Consistency and thoroughness

The majority of performance evaluations generated at UCSC document performance in courses of 50 or more students. In courses of this size it is often difficult, if not impossible, to come to know each student personally. Some students will make the effort to establish a fuller relation with you; others will not. As a result, you will find that the level of commentary you are able to provide in performance evaluations will vary from student to student. This raises an important question: should you restrict yourself to indicators of student performance that are universally shared by students (such as test scores, evaluations of written work, etc.) or can your evaluations vary? This is for you to decide: Senate regulations afford you complete authority in determining the degree of consistency and thoroughness of performance evaluation. In making this determination, however, there are a number of factors you may wish to consider. Do you wish to acknowledge student effort at developing a fuller line of communication with you? Have you strayed from evaluating performance to commenting on personality? Will your comments be understood by the student and other readers? Regardless of class size, remember that it is the quality of the evaluation that is important, not its length.

6. What is and is not acceptable content?

Evaluations describe the quality and characteristics of student performance in the class. Comments not germane to student performance are not acceptable in performance evaluations. For example, "Student A is very bright but did not commit sufficient effort to this course" does not document performance and is, at best, conjecture. It is better to let the student's work speak for itself, for example, "Student A's work was mixed. Two papers were highly insightful and superbly crafted while the other two were sloppily assembled and cursory." Similarly, "Student B did not do well on the midterm as the result of a severe case of flu" is not acceptable. You may think that providing personal information (flu) puts a poor performance into a more favorable context, but a potential employer might not agree. We recommend substituting the phrase, "circumstances beyond his/her control," in cases where you think such explanation is absolutely necessary.

Student ability, health, physical or learning disabilities, religious and political beliefs, and the like, are never considerations in student assessment and have no place in performance evaluation. Students have the right to initiate grievances for performance evaluations that they feel are based on criteria other than academic performance or that apply academic criteria in an arbitrary or capricious way that does not reflect student performance in relation to course requirements. The

student grievance procedure can be found in Appendix C in the Manual of the Santa Cruz Division Academic Senate (<http://senate.ucsc.edu/manual/SCapp99.html#AppendixC>).

The explicit mention of letter grades in performance evaluations is permitted. Given the near universal character of letter grading systems, inclusion of a letter grade or grades in an evaluation may provide a compact and potentially precise summary of student performance. However, letter grades are single-dimensional indicators of student performance and are inherently limited. Furthermore, performance evaluations can counteract the effects of grade inflation. CEP recommends that you bear these considerations in mind when using letter grades in written evaluations (see also section 8). CEP further recommends that you respect the decision of students who have chosen to enroll on a P/NP basis by avoiding mention of a letter grade in the performance evaluation.

7. Mapping adjectives to grades

The majority of students in a course will receive a letter grade at the end of the quarter. At the end of the quarter, it is important that the performance evaluation be consistent with the summary letter grade. The following table will help you choose adjectives that are consistent with the grade assigned. These rough correspondences have emerged as the consensus of a large number of UCSC faculty and are consistent with Systemwide regulations. The list is not exhaustive, and many other descriptors are appropriate.

Grade	P/NP	Adjectives
A	P	Honors, superb, outstanding, excellent, top-notch
B	P	Very good, quite good, above average
C	P	Average, satisfactory, fairly good, passing
D*	NP	Below average, marginal
F	NP	Poor, inadequate, inferior, unsatisfactory

*At UCSC the grade of D results only in credit toward the requirement of 180 credit hours for graduation; courses for which the student receives a grade of D do not count toward major, minor, or college requirements or for general education. There is no C-; students whose work is passing, but below C in quality receive a D. The choice of adjectives in the evaluation should be consistent with the grade of D.

8. The coursework description field

The instructor may choose to write a brief description of the coursework that the Registrar inserts at the beginning of each student's evaluation. This is information about the classwork that is applicable to all students in the class and does not vary from student to student. Typical content includes the scope of the course, textbooks used, a breakdown of assignments and exams, etc. In larger classes, the coursework description is well used to document the basis of student evaluation. You may wish to include the average grade or median score for the class as a powerful hedge against grade

inflation. You should usually avoid simply quoting the catalog description of the class which is available on the web.

The Committee on Educational Policy imposes a limit of 60 words on coursework descriptions. Although this may seem restrictive, it must be remembered that a student's transcript is an evaluation of that student's work, not a series of expansive coursework descriptions written by instructors with understandable pride.

CEP recommends that you revise your coursework description with each offering of the course.

9. The question of timeliness

As the instructor of record, you are responsible for providing a performance evaluation for every student receiving credit in your course and for doing so in a timely fashion (see regulation 9.2.2 above). When evaluations are not written, students are deprived of important feedback on their performance, they and their academic advisors/preceptors are deprived of evaluations for academic standing review, honors and awards, and student applications to graduate programs and professional schools may be compromised.

10. Closing remarks

UCSC is unique in the University of California system, and amongst major research universities in the US, in providing written performance evaluations to students—a key aspect of our continuing commitment to undergraduate education. The continued vitality of our performance evaluation system relies on the faculty's willingness to use the system to their best advantage by authoring evaluations that are accurate, meaningful, and readable, but which do not unduly tax the instructor or require an alteration in her/his pedagogy. Used properly, the written performance evaluation system should not be a burden, but rather a tool in teaching. Experiment, talk with colleagues, examine the many example evaluations in this document and, most important, let the system work for you and your students.

Appendix. Sample: Transcript of performance evaluations

This sample performance evaluation transcript is edited from an actual student's official transcript. Although CEP does not find all the evaluations in this transcript to be exemplary, the variety of evaluation types and forms is indicative of the various practices of faculty members across campus.

